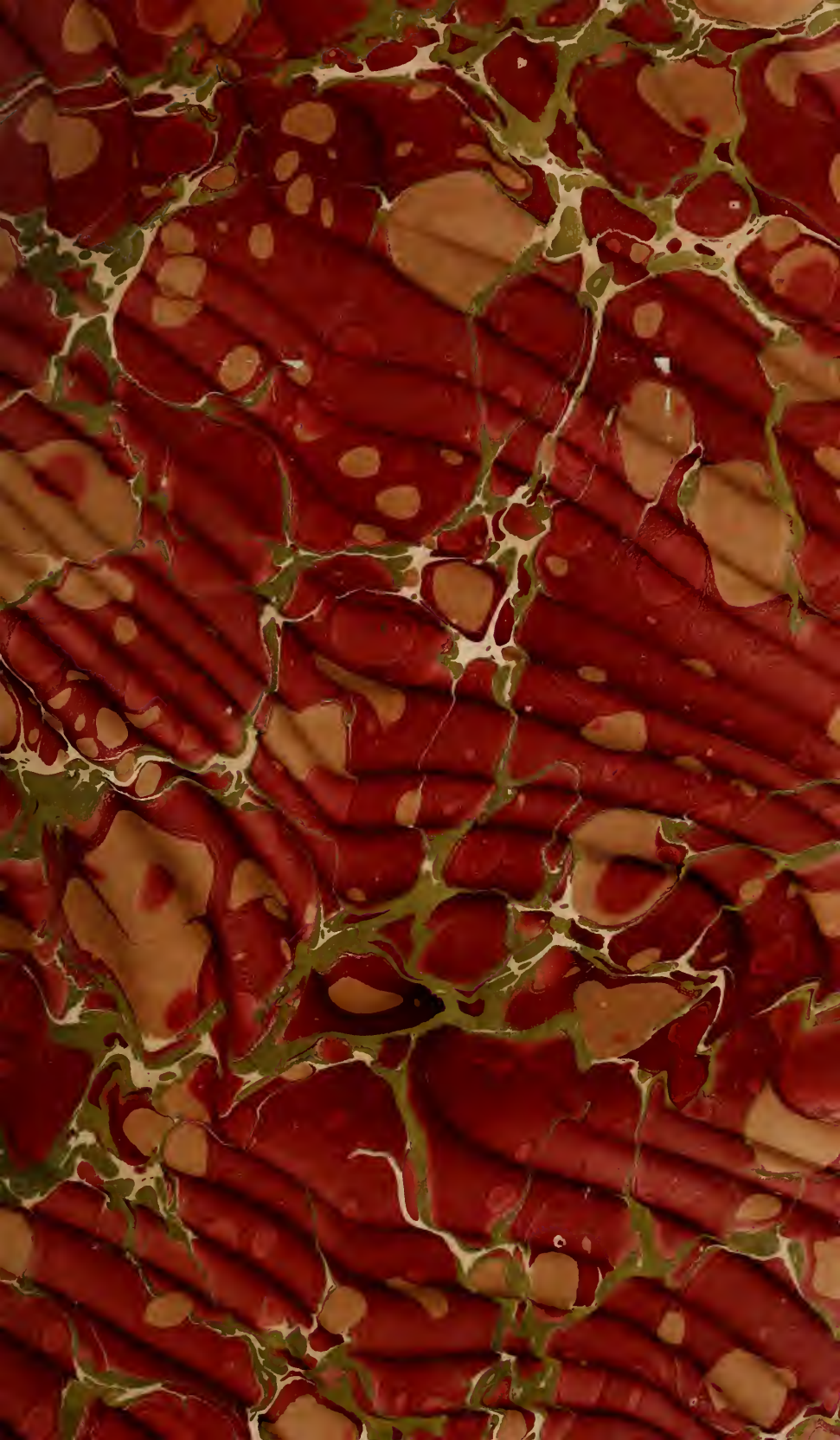
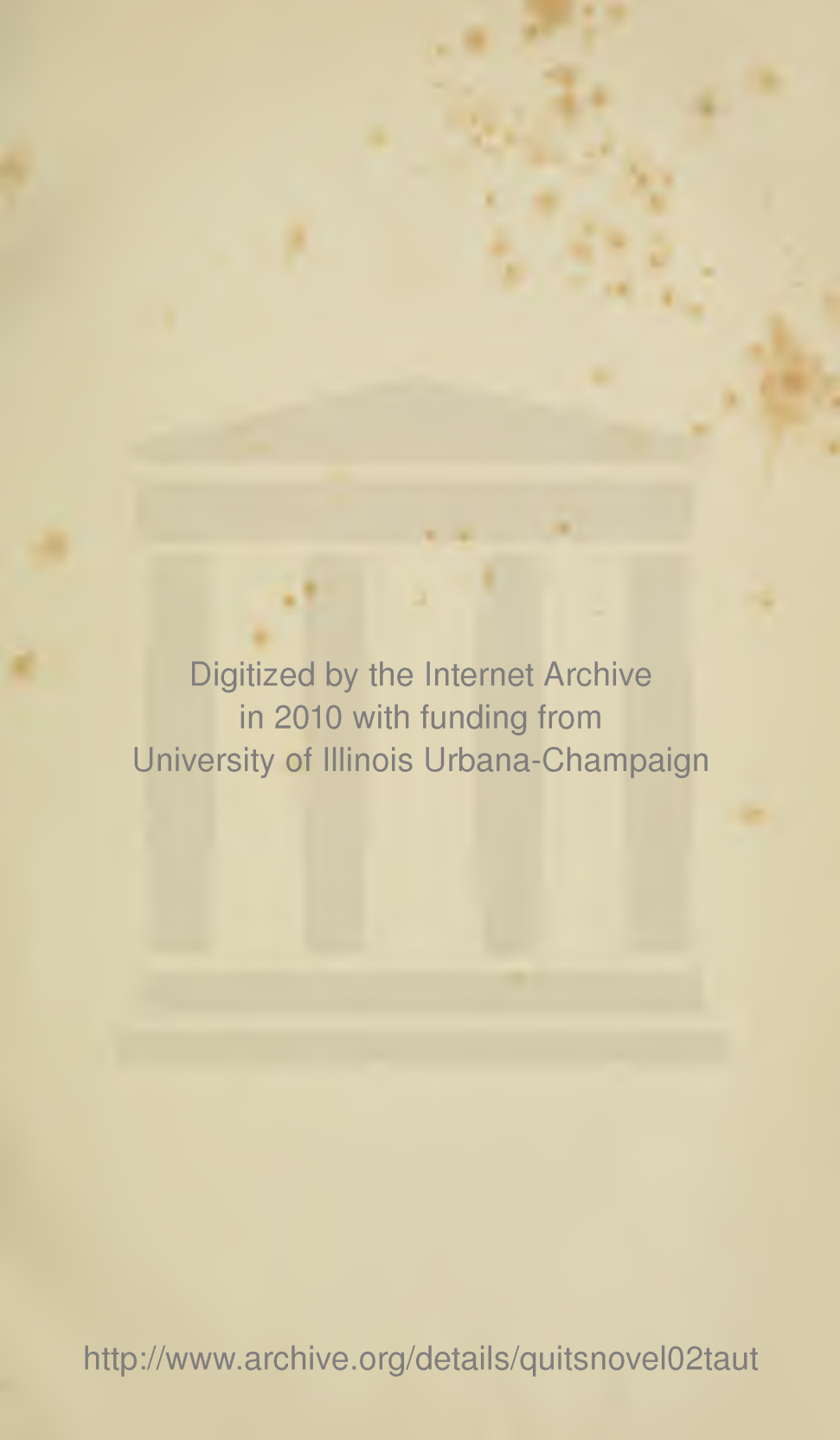


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Q U I T S ;

A NOVEL.

BY

THE BARONESS TAUTPHÆUS,

AUTHOR OF "THE INITIALS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# Q U I T S !

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## CHAPTER I.

### PEASANT ARTISTS.

THE road from the Peissenberg to Ober-Ammergau, though not uninteresting, presents little worthy of notice until, after having passed Murnau, the mountains appear gradually to close around it; soon after the summit of the Watterstein rises majestically in the background, and the steep ascent of the Ettal mountain commences. It was here that the carriages, carts, omnibuses, and crowds of pedestrians assumed the appearance of a procession to a pilgrimage, and here that the justness of some of Nora's remarks on her uncle's heavy and unwieldy travelling carriage first became manifest; for had not the neighbouring peasants been prepared to supply additional horses they would have been obliged to have either procured a lighter vehicle or have pursued their way on foot. The church and

former monastery of Ettal, an immense pile of building, became visible at the top of the mountain, and there they once more found themselves in a valley, above the green hills on each side of which rocky peaks again presented themselves.

A short drive then brought them to the village of Ober-Ammergau, where with much noise and pretension the Nixons' carriage drew up before the door of the inn, and the courier sprang to the ground. Nora, quite prepared for the intelligence that they could not get rooms there, had descended, and was beginning to make inquiries about Herr Zwink and Pater Ignaz, when their acquaintance of the previous evening, Waldemar, advanced towards her, and with the assurance that the inhabitants of the village were quite willing to inconvenience themselves in any way to afford travellers shelter for the night, added that, if they did not mind being separated, he doubted not being able to provide for them some way or other. Nora and John accompanied him in his search, and before long Mr. Nixon and his son were put in possession of a small room, Georgina was given one still more diminutive, and immediately under the roof, but in the same house; while Nora, accompanied by the half-wondering, half-discontented Mrs. Nesbitt, proceeded to a neighbouring peasant's cottage, where, Waldemar observed carelessly, he and his friend Torp had been so fortunate as to get lodgings for the night.

As is usual in the Bavarian Highlands, the houses composing the village were detached, each in its orchard, and generally furnished with a little garden in front. Most picturesque and sanctified they looked, with their low overhanging roofs, ornamented gables, and walls covered with frescos, the subjects of which were all from holy writ, while the Ettal Madonna, conspicuously placed, seemed framed as it were in flourishes and ornaments of the most elaborate description.

The interiors of these houses are as similar as their exteriors: there is the long narrow passage leading through the house to the offices, the steep staircase and kitchen in the distance, the doors right and left on entering, one of which invariably conducts into the sitting-room of the family, with its large green stove surrounded by wooden benches that, as fixtures, are continued along the walls of the room, the windows almost covered by luxuriant exotics, and the massive table of well scoured maple-wood in the corner where the cross light of a front and side window falls upon it.

The inhabitants of Ammergau are scarcely peasants in the common acceptation of the word: the ground and country about them is not favourable for the growth of corn, they occupy themselves but little with field labour, and neglect the usual resource of other Alpine districts—the breeding of cattle. As manufacturers of toys and carvers of wood they at first appear to have improved their

condition, and attained a higher position in the world ; but though, in an intellectual point of view, this may be the case, in material well-being they are far behind the other peasants of the mountainous parts of Bavaria. The chief profits fall into the hands of foreign agents and the possessors of warehouses ; yet so artistically inclined are these people, and so experienced are they in the carving of wood, that they prefer it to all other occupation. The very children from earliest infancy make rude attempts, and assist in colouring and varnishing the ordinary toys that serve as playthings to little beings of their own age, whose chief pleasure and occupation seem to be the speedy destruction of them.

At the door of one of these houses Waldemar stopped, apparently surprised at finding the benches outside occupied by a row of people who rose as he approached. They proved to be acquaintances, for he extended his hand to an athletic old man in a hunter's dress, made some inquiries about his family, and nodding familiarly to the others before entering the house, he passed Nora in order to open the door of the sitting-room of the proprietor. She heard a hasty discussion about rooms — regret that he had not explained his wishes before the arrival of the Forstward from Almenau, and a proposal to lodge the daughter of the latter elsewhere.

‘ No, no, no,’ cried Waldemar, returning to the

passage and requesting Nora to follow him up the stairs.

‘Miss Nixe,’ he said, throwing open the door of a small low room, ‘this apartment is quite at your service, and I believe I must advise you to take possession of it without delay, as it has already happened more than once this summer that travellers have been obliged to pass the night in their carriages.’

‘But,’ said Nora, glancing towards a portmanteau and some already unpacked toilet requisites, ‘but this is your room, and I cannot think of depriving you of it until you have secured another.’

‘Torp must share his with me,’ answered Waldemar, opening the door of the adjoining apartment, and beginning to shove his portmanteau into it with his foot.

Nora motioned to Nesbitt to assist, and perhaps might herself have aided had not the voice of Torp announced his presence.

‘Hollo! what are you at now, Waldemar?’ he said good-humouredly. ‘Have you repented giving me the best room and come to dislodge me?’

‘Not exactly,’ answered Waldemar, ‘I only want you to share it with me, as I have resigned mine to—’ here he lowered his voice and spoke rapidly in German, ‘to your fair countrywoman, the naiad, the nymph, the black-eyed Nixie!’

‘Better than the old alderman or his son,’ said Torp, drily; ‘but you must refrain from smoking,

Waldemar, if you do not mean to cancel the whole obligation, for English nymphs eschew the smell of tobacco, and I am much mistaken if that door will effectually prevent the entrance of the fumes of your cigars, or the most subdued tones of our melodious voices. Singing is out of the question to-night, Waldemar, neither hunting-song nor—'

'Hush, Torp! she's there and may hear what you say,' cried Waldemar.

She had in fact more than heard; she had caught a glimpse of his figure, stretched at full length on a row of chairs, so placed as to represent a sofa, while with arms folded, and head thrown back, his eyes followed his friend's energetic movements with an expression of lazy amusement.

The arrangements were soon completed; and then Waldemar stepped up close to Torp, laid his hand on his shoulder, and whispered, 'You're a better fellow than I thought you, Charley. I half expected you to be dissatisfied, as, on our way here to-day, you seemed so strangely averse to any interchange of civilities with your countrymen, or the slightest acquaintance with the family of Nix.'

'I shall make no attempt to interfere with your civilities in future,' said Torp, quietly; 'the more so, as I flatter myself that I can keep these people at a distance, and avoid an acquaintance which I confess *would* be disagreeable, and might be embarrassing to me.'



‘*Con-found* your arrogance!’ exclaimed Waldemar impatiently, turning away.

In the meantime, Nesbitt had been looking round the small apartment rather disconsolately. She could find nothing to interest her in the coloured prints that decorated the white-washed walls—the painted bedstead, with bright yellow arabesques on the head and foot-board, and the letters I. H. S. above the pillows—or the large wardrobe before which Nora stood, apparently lost in contemplation of the Madonna and Saviour that were painted on the upper panels, and the gaudy flower-vases that decorated the lower.

‘I shall send your courier to you for orders,’ said Waldemar, re-entering the room, ‘and I hope you may be able to make yourself tolerably comfortable for one night.’

‘I really do not know how to thank you for resigning your room in this generous manner,’ began Nora.

‘Pray do not attempt it, or even think of it,’ said Waldemar, smiling, as he took up his hat and the little drawing-book that lay on the window-stool.

‘I suppose, ma’am,’ said Nesbitt, after he had left them, ‘I suppose he has gone about a room for me now, ma’am?’

‘Suppose no such thing,’ said Nora; ‘but consider yourself fortunate in getting from me this great feather-bed and a pillow on the floor!’

‘Lor, ma’am, you don’t mean that you will sleep on the palliasse?’

‘Many will have to sleep on straw or hay to-night, Mrs. Nesbitt,’ answered Nora: ‘do you think the thousands of people now in this village are likely to find beds?’

‘P’raps not, ma’am, but peasants—’

‘Peasants,’ said Nora, ‘are here accustomed to rooms and beds such as we now see. Every one must be satisfied with what they can get to-night, Nesbitt; and you had better now return to Miss Nixon, and make yourself useful, while I find out the people of the house and get acquainted with them.’

She found the peasant’s wife in the kitchen, preparing supper for her numerous expected and unexpected guests and was received by her with the warmest expressions of hospitality, and many regrets that her room was not what such a young lady was accustomed to.

Nora assured her she considered herself very fortunate in being so well provided for; she had not expected it when she had seen the crowds on the road.

The peasant laughed, and observed that all the garrets, lofts, and even barns would be filled with people throughout the whole neighbourhood; and how many would arrive in the morning it would be hard to say! She only hoped there would be places enough in the theatre, for, large as it was, it had already happened that some thousands had

to be refused admittance, and the play performed over again for them the day after!

She said all this with such evident pride and satisfaction, that Nora continued the conversation, and soon discovered that there was no inconvenience to which the villagers would not submit cheerfully, in order to accommodate strangers who came to see their 'play,' considering them guests whose presence would serve to increase the brilliancy and reputation of the great performance.

Here it may be observed, that no advantage whatever is taken on such occasions by the inhabitants of Ammergau to obtain profit of any kind; they barely allow themselves to be remunerated for actual outlay in the purchase of provisions, giving their houses and time willingly to all who require their assistance.

While Nora still lingered in the kitchen, two young girls entered it, followed by the children of the house, joyously shouting 'The miller's Madeleine, and the forester's Rosel, from Almenau!'

This meant that they were the daughters of the miller and forester of that place, and therefore the greeting of the peasant's wife was listened to attentively by Nora.

It was hearty in the extreme,—she shook their hands, laughed, patted their shoulders, and then turned the miller's remarkably pretty daughter round and round, declaring she did so to ascertain if she had grown taller since the morning.

The girl blushed and said, if she were not taller she was certainly happier.

‘And when is the wedding?’

‘About Michaelmas. I wish Rosel’s father would let her marry the Crag’s peasant’s Seppel at the same time.’

Rosel did not blush at all as she seconded this wish, adding that ‘there was little chance, as her father could not forget nor forgive Seppel’s having joined the other peasant lads in the year forty-eight, and taken advantage of the short time he was at home on leave to shoot the best herd of chamois in the whole district; ‘he said then,’ she continued, ‘and says now, that he will never give any one belonging to him to a—a---wild hunter!’

‘Ah, bah!’ cried the peasant’s wife; ‘there was scarcely a lad in the village of Almenau, or anywhere else in the Highlands, that did not do the same in forty-eight, and no one thought the worse of them for doing what was allowed by law.’

‘That’s true,’ said Rosel, ‘and I’ve often told him so; for, saving Seppel’s brother Andere, and the miller’s man, black Seppel, they were all out more or less.’

‘No doubt of it, Rosel—and here too, and everywhere in the land. But now that Crag’s Seppel has served his six years as cuirassier, and got a discharge that any man might be proud of, your father should overlook his having used his rifle too freely in former times, and let by-gones be by-gones.’

‘If it had not been for that unlucky chamois last year, perhaps he might,’ rejoined Rosel, ‘I mean the one that came over the mountain from Tyrol, and that father had watched and preserved for Count Waldemar. Game was so scarce just then, and mostly up high among the rocks. As ill-luck would have it, Seppel—’

‘No, but he didn’t, though!’ exclaimed the woman, evidently amazed at this instance of temerity.

‘I was going to tell you,’ continued Rosel, ‘that Seppel just then had to see after the cattle on his father’s Alp, and unluckily took it into his head to go on to the fisherman’s at the Kerbstein lake, passing over the very ground that my father cannot hear named without vowing vengeance on all wild hunters. Well, and so he and the count hunted afterwards for two days and a night together without getting a shot, and went over the mountains into Tyrol, but never saw or heard more of the chamois.’

The peasant’s wife seemed to consider this conclusive, and went on with her cooking.

‘It appears to me,’ said Nora, ‘that they condemned this Seppel on very slight evidence. Might not another have been the offender? Was no one else absent from the village at the same time?’

‘No one but Seppel would have dared to do it,’ observed the peasant’s wife, without looking up.

‘Though he may be suspected, he ought not to

be condemned without stronger proof,' continued Nora.

'So I always say,' observed Rosel in reply; 'but my father declares that that buck was so old and wary, that no one in the village but Seppel could have followed and hunted him down. And you see,' she continued—and Nora fancied she detected a sort of suppressed exultation in the voice of the bright-eyed girl—'you see Seppel never hunts anything but chamois, and when he finds them high up on the rocks, he thinks it no crime to take a shot, and—and—he never misses, never!'

'That's true,' chimed in the miller's daughter. 'Every one says Seppel ought to be made an under-keeper, or wood-ranger, or something of that sort, and then the forester would like him as much as he now dislikes him.'

'His being an under-keeper would not be much gain for Rosel,' said the peasant's wife; 'he might as well be a cuirassier for all the chance of marriage he would have. I would rather hear that his old father was going to resign house and land at the Craggs to him, and that—'

Here a loud tapping at the window was heard, which made them all start and look round.

'Bless me!' exclaimed the peasant's wife, 'if there isn't Seppel himself, on his way from Munich, and in his handsome uniform, to astonish us all! We greet you a thousand times,' she added, springing to the window and throwing it open, while

hands were extended, and then eagerly protruded through the iron bars; one of these he retained, giving it an occasional jerk, while he explained that a letter having informed him he should meet friends if he went to Ammergau, he had not required long to make up his mind to see them and the great play at the same time. All he now wanted was to find somebody who would give him shelter for the night.

‘Shelter and a bundle of hay you can have, Sepp,’ laughed the peasant’s wife; ‘I had nothing better to give my own sister’s son, Florian, when he was here last week.’

‘I suspect I can sleep better on hay than Florian,’ said Seppel. ‘He came to see the great play, of course?’

‘Yes, and brought his mother with him. It was long since we sisters had been together, but we knew we should see little more of each other when she married into Almenau, and we should hear nothing either if Florian had not taken after our family, and been, as I may say, born an artist. He alone keeps up the relationship now, by coming here so often for one thing or another. Last week he ordered some ornaments to be carved for St. Hubert’s Chapel in the wood. He’s been given the renovation of the altars there, and he says it will be a troublesome job, as the new parts must be made exactly to match the rest, which is very curious, and ever so many hundred years old. If

you should go to Almenau, miss,' she added, turning to Nora, 'you ought to make a pilgrimage to St. Hubert's.'

'I shall certainly do so,' answered Nora, 'and if you have any message to your nephew Florian, I can be the bearer of it, as I intend to remain some time at Almenau.'

'He lives at the end of the village with his mother, who has the shop there,' said the peasant's wife, evidently pleased at Nora's willingness to visit her relations. 'Any one can show you Meister Florian's studio, for he is quite an artist, and has been at the academy in Munich.'

During the last few minutes some hurried whisperings had been going on at the window, which Nora did not consider it necessary to interrupt, or even appear to observe, so she walked out of the kitchen, and turned into the dwelling-room, where she found the peasant himself, finishing a most elaborate piece of carving--a goblet with figures in high relief and gothic ornaments. He stopped working for a moment, to raise a small Greek cap that covered his bald head, pointed to a seat, and perceiving that she did not intend to interrupt him, continued his occupation, first nodding to a man who was sitting opposite to him, and then murmuring something about wishing to hear the end of the affair.

The person addressed was the elderly man to whom Waldemar had spoken before entering the



house. His dress and manner, joined to his bearded sunburnt face, made Nora suppose him a forester or woodranger, and she was soon not only confirmed in this idea, but also convinced that he was to be the future father-in-law of the miller's daughter Madeleine.

'The end is soon told,' he continued, playing with some carving tools that lay temptingly near his hands. 'You may easily suppose that I expected a right good match for my son Franz, after having sent him to the foresters' academy, and secured him a chance of being before long set far above myself, for I have not the learning required for a forst-meister now-a-days. Well, back comes Franz to me as assistant forester, by way of a beginning, and gets one of our best rooms, and writes and studies, and is treated with that respect by my old woman, that you would suppose he had taken orders and was priest of the parish at least; all that was wanting was that she should say "sir" to him. His sister Rosel made much of him too, and it was her friendship with the mountain miller's family, added to the nearness of the houses and long acquaintance, that brought about the match. Now you see, money there must be on one side or the other. My son has education and good prospects, and the mountain miller's daughter will inherit the mill and a good fortune besides. Franz always had a fancy for Madeleine, but I did not choose to hear of it when he was last at home,

for it was well known that the miller's affairs were in a ruinous condition, and so they continued until his mill was burnt down a few years ago. I dare say you heard when it happened, for there was a good deal of talk about it at the time.'

'I remember,' said the wood-carver, looking up for a moment, 'I remember hearing that it was supposed the miller himself—'

'The miller had gone to his brother in Munich when the fire took place,' said the forester, interrupting him hastily, 'I ought to know all about it, living so near you know! He came home the day after, and was in a state of distraction, such as I never saw—his brother had promised to help him out of his difficulties, and advance him money for better works, and a new water-course, so that he hoped to have begun a new life, as he said, over and over again. It was an awful sight to see him sitting moaning among the blackened ruins of the old mill as if quite out of his mind, and indeed he has never been the same man since. We did all we could to console him, took his daughter to live with us until the house was rebuilt, and—'

'People here,' observed the wood-carver, once more looking up, 'people here said the insurance was high—far beyond the value of the mill.'

'Well it *was* high,' replied the forester, 'and so much the better for him, he required less assistance from his brother, rebuilt both house and mill,

and since that time the world has prospered with him in every respect.'

'If,' said the wood-carver, putting down his work, 'if he were not encumbered with that right-hand man of his—black Seppel, the Tyrolean!'

'I have advised him more than once to get rid of black Seppel,' said the forester, 'but he says he can't do without him, and the truth is Seppel certainly does understand not only the management of the mill, but the ground about it, far better than the miller himself.'

The peasant artist began to arrange his carving tools in a cupboard, Nora requested him to allow her to examine the goblet on which he had been working, and while she was doing so, he turned to the forester and said, 'No doubt Seppel is a clever fellow, but they say he manages the miller as well as the mill, and through him both wife and daughter.'

'I suppose Florian has told you all this,' said the forester, 'perhaps he also mentioned that the miller's brother, the locksmith in Munich, died not long ago, and has left him everything he possessed.'

'Of course he told me that, and talked so much of Madeleine, that I suspected he had thoughts of becoming one of her suitors himself.'

'Ah! poor Florian—little chance for him when my Franz was in the way! It was all settled

between me and the miller this morning, and there is to be a betrothal when we get home.'

'And what will black Seppel say?' persisted the wood-carver.

'What business is it of his?' asked the forester.

'Why, many suppose he had an eye on Madeleine himself, and he comes of respectable people you know—the son of a miller in Tyrol they say!'

'Yet he must be ill off at home,' observed the forester, 'or he would not remain so long in service. Men obliged to serve cannot think of marriage.'

'Florian says that Seppel remains at the mill on account of Madeleine,' rejoined the wood-carver, 'and that he watches her better than either her father or mother. Last year at the church festival, when she only danced once round the room with Florian, up he came and reminded her quite sternly that she was not yet eighteen years of age, consequently a Sunday-school scholar, and not allowed to dance in public! and then he walked her off home threatening a reprimand from the priest.'

'I think my Franz will put an end to his interference in future,' observed the forester, 'and you'll come to the wedding won't you?'

'I believe,' answered the wood-carver, 'my wife will be with her sister in Almenau about that time, and we can't well leave home together, not to mention the orders for work that I have lately received.'

At this moment John entered the room, and hastily informed Nora that they were waiting dinner for her at the inn. Waldemar was with him, and advanced to look at the goblet still in her hands.

‘I should like to purchase this,’ she said, turning to the wood-carver, ‘that is,’ she added, perceiving he hesitated, ‘that is, provided it be not already bespoken.’

‘Not just that,’ he answered, ‘but——we are expected to send these things to the warehouse, where you can have the choice of all the carving in Ammergau.’

‘Am I to understand that you are not at liberty to sell me this?’ said Nora.

‘At liberty! oh yes, of course—but I don’t like to lose, or run a chance of losing, my certain sale at the warehouse for the small advantage of disposing of one or two articles privately.’

‘Are you well paid for work of this kind?’ she asked.

‘Well, I suppose so—it is slow gain at best, and I sometimes think that out-door labour though harder is healthier, and brings more surely abundance into one’s house. Had I turned out a mere toy-maker, I might have given it up, perhaps, but having arrived at carving in this style,’ he added, looking approvingly at his goblet, ‘and made a name for myself as an artist, nothing would induce me to turn my hand to any other kind of work now!’

‘So the hope of fame asserts its rights even in this cottage,’ observed Nora in English, half to herself, half to John, who stood beside her, a perfect personification of impatience.

‘Come, Norry, let’s go to dinner,’ he answered, ‘I never was so hungry in all my life, and Georgy says she’s quite exhausted.’

As Nora followed him out of the room, Waldemar joined her, and said, ‘You smiled at our peasant artist’s ambition, Mees Nixe, without knowing the full extent of his aspirations. He dares to hope that his goblet may be deemed worthy of a place at your Great Exhibition in London next year.’

‘Where it will undoubtedly be much admired,’ replied Nora, ‘but I fear the name of the artist seldom asked, and soon forgotten.’

‘Perhaps so,’ rejoined Waldemar; ‘but it would be cruel to enlighten him on this subject.’

‘You need not fear my doing so,’ said Nora; ‘I shall soon forget his innocent ambition, but not so easily his remark, that out-of-door labour was not alone more healthy, but even more profitable than wood carving, though of the very finest description.’

‘And he was right, Mees Nixe; the peasants here and in Grodner Valley in Tyrol are almost altogether manufacturers, and manufacturing districts are never so healthy and seldom so wealthy in the best sense of the word, as agricultural.’

‘Many people,’ said Nora, ‘suppose that no other peasants but the Swiss and Tyroleans are wood carvers, and most English travellers have very obscure notions of the boundaries between the Highlands of Bavaria and Tyrol.’

‘And in fact,’ said Waldemar, ‘the scenery is so similar, that if it were not for the Custom Houses, and the black and yellow painted bars and posts, a stranger could scarcely discover that he was in another land. You, however, who have evidently been long in Germany, must be aware of the great difference in the inhabitants.’

‘Of course I am,’ answered Nora; ‘the Tyroleans are a much handsomer, much poorer, and much more melancholy people than the Bavarians.’

‘Poor and melancholy,’ repeated Waldemar; ‘it is time for me to tell you that I am a Tyrolean from the Valley of the Inn.’

‘Then you must be aware of the truth of my observation,’ continued Nora; ‘for though the inhabitants of your valley, from being on the high road to Innsbruck, may be better off than those of other parts of Tyrol, the contrast on entering Bavaria is too striking to be overseen by any but very unobservant travellers. I do not require to see your Custom House, or painted boards, to know where I am! The first little inn on the roadside with its room full of shouting, laughing, and singing peasants, would tell me that I had passed the frontiers, and entered the merry Highlands of Bavaria.’

‘They do shout and sing a good deal about here,’ said Waldemar.

‘And they do *not* sing much in Tyrol,’ rejoined Nora, ‘excepting in the Zillar valley, known to us English people as the birthplace of the Reiner family, who made themselves rich by singing their Alpine songs all over Europe.’

‘I am surprised to find that the habits and manners of the peasants can interest you so much,’ observed Waldemar.

‘On the present occasion in an unusual degree,’ she answered. ‘I—that is, we—we are about to erect a monument in the churchyard at Almenau to the memory of a near relation who died there, and I have undertaken to find out a family worthy to be entrusted with the care of this grave.’

‘Ah, I understand. You intend to deposit a sum of money the interest of which will be paid to the family for that purpose.’

‘Some such idea has occupied my mind lately,’ said Nora, as they stopped at the door of the inn; ‘so you may imagine that the inhabitants of Almenau interest me at present in no common degree.’

She did not wait to hear his answer, for perceiving Torp approaching, she entered the inn, and soon afterwards found herself seated at the end of a long table beside her uncle and cousins in a room crowded with the most extraordinary mixture of all ranks of people.



## CHAPTER II.

## A REMNANT OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

As the evening drew to a close, the melodious bells of the village church pealed long and loudly. The arrivals of strangers became still more frequent, carriage followed carriage, until the street was almost blocked up, and the unwieldy omnibuses scarcely found place to discharge their muffled contents. Mr. Nixon and his family had dined, and those around him supped, on precisely the same succession of viands at the crowded table d'hôte of the inn, when the report of cannon and the sound of distant music caused fresh, and, if possible, increased commotion in the room.

Some hurried to the windows, others rushed to the door, among the latter John, followed more leisurely by Nora. They reached the street in time to witness some violent efforts that were made to remove the various vehicles from their places, so as to open a passage for the procession of the Ammergau musicians, who were marching from one end of the long village to the other playing slow and solemn music intended to remind the assembled multitude that the vigil of the great holiday had commenced. They played well, and created much sensation as they passed by, drawing all the inha-

bitants of the village to their doors or windows, and most strangers fairly into the street.

John and Nora were soon separated, and the latter, finding herself in the neighbourhood of the forester's daughter, joined her, and partly to avoid the vicinity of some cattle returning late from pasture, partly to make inquiries about Almenau, she sauntered with her beyond the houses of the village, until she unexpectedly found herself at the one where she was to sleep that night; she might have passed it too without notice had not the peasant who was seated before the door raised his little cap as she approached, and his wife smiled recognition. Nora's companion pointed to the miller and his wife, who, with the forester, were seated at the other side of the door, the robust frame and face of the latter forming a strong contrast to the emaciated figure and pallid features of the former. The eyes of all were following the steps of the newly betrothed pair, who having perhaps left them to join the musicians, now lingered on the road together, unconscious alike of these looks of pride and affection, and the arch smiles and jocose nudges and winks passing among the homeward-bound peasants who hurried along the road.

There was something about the young assistant forester that immediately prepossessed Nora in his favour. The strongly built muscular figure accorded well with the dark complexioned and profusely bearded face, while both contributed to

render conspicuous the mild, almost pensive expression of his clear hazel eyes. He was dressed in a loose grey shooting jacket, green waistcoat, and shorts of black chamois leather; his knees were bare, and he wore grey worsted leggings with fanciful green clocks, that reached but did not cover the ankles, while his feet rested, uncovered by socks, in heavy nailed shoes, seemingly formed to defy all weather and roads: his shirt was scarcely held together by the light black kerchief that served as cravat, and left exposed a large portion of a broad brown chest shining like polished wood. His green felt hat, with its tuft of black-cock feathers, was in the hands of Madeleine, and he smiled while watching her decorating it still more with a gay bouquet of wild flowers. Rosel introduced him to Nora by proudly exclaiming, 'This is my brother Franz!' and had his dress led to the expectation of a peasant's greeting, Nora was immediately reminded that education had made him a gentleman. Nothing could be more easy and unembarrassed than his manner, and Rosel's bright intelligent eyes watched eagerly the impression he was making on the English lady, who seemed to speak to him quite as if he were Count Waldemar himself!

Nora had while speaking moved towards the house, and then sat with the peasants and their guests until they retired to the sitting-room, when having been joined by Mrs. Nesbitt, and received

a tall slim candle, she mounted the steep staircase conducting to her room, and went to bed.

The weather was sultry—Nora's room over the kitchen, where the peasant's wife, 'on hospitable thoughts intent,' had cooked the live-long day. The pillows and plumeau, well-aired on sunny balcony, rose like mountains on each side of her: they seemed to glow, and though want of rest on the previous night made her painfully sleepy, the heat at length became so intolerable that she sprang from her bed, and threw wide open the little lattice window, actually gasping for breath as she leaned out of it. The sound of voices in the orchard beneath made her shrink back again, but the moon had not yet risen, and the night was still so dark that she need not have bound up so carefully her long hair, dishevelled by the recent tossings on downy pillows, or drawn her dressing-gown so very closely round her, as she once more approached the source of fresh air. A slight odour of tobacco was wafted towards her with the words, 'Well, I don't deny that she is pretty and interesting, and that her figure is slight and graceful, but you must allow me to doubt her being so very youthful as you seem to suppose.'

'I don't care what her age may be,' answered a voice that Nora knew to be Waldemar's, 'she's very charming, and I shall take advantage of the first convenient opportunity to tell her that I think so.'

‘Better not,’ replied Torp; ‘for although I have been too seldom in England, during the last ten years, to know much about the pecuniary affairs of these people, I can, at least, tell you that a lot of sons being in the family will prevent this new object of your adoration from having a sufficiently large fortune to induce your father to overlook her want of pedigree. I happened once by a singular chance to have an interest in ascertaining that the lineage of these Nixons loses itself mysteriously in the obscurity of that part of the city of London where fogs are thickest, and days are shortest.’

‘What matter!’ cried Waldemar, laughing, ‘that need not prevent me from admiring her to any reasonable extent. I was not so serious as you supposed, notwithstanding my somewhat strong expressions of commendation just now, and merely meditate lending her my heart for a week or two while we are at Almenau, nothing more, I assure you.’

‘I wish,’ said Torp, ‘you would be rational, and do what would be infinitely pleasanter for me than being thrown among these people, and that is, go at once from hence to the Valley of the Inn; your father expects us at Herrenburg, and when these English people have left Almenau there will still be time enough for us to have a few weeks’ sport before the end of the season.’

‘Very likely,’ answered Waldemar, ‘but by that time Irene Schaumberg will be with us, and I shall not be able to leave home.’

‘What! Do you expect the widowed countess with daughter and dogs from the banks of the Danube?’

‘Yes. She comes ostensibly to be present at my brother Carl’s marriage, which takes place some time next month; he has been engaged these three years to Lotta Falkner of St. Benedict’s.’

Nora, who had withdrawn from the window unwilling to overhear this conversation, found that unless she closed the casement every word distinctly reached her ear in the profound silence of the night. That they had been speaking of her she more than suspected, but she thought not of them or herself either just then, so completely had her interest been absorbed by the name of Irene Schaumberg and the few words following. Back, back, back she went to her earliest recollections, and the ground-floor of a large house in Vienna was her home. In the *bel étage* Count Schaumberg lived, and he had sons—rude boys of whom she was much afraid; they ran after her when she played in the court, chased her up and down the stairs, and one day fairly carried her struggling into their father’s apartments, where, pushing her towards a springing laughing little girl of her own age, they exclaimed—‘There, Irene, there she is for you; don’t let her go, or she’ll be off again like an arrow.’ But when Irene had whispered, ‘Oh, come and play with me, mamma says we may!’ she had gone willingly enough to the drawing-room,

and from that time forward they had become constant companions. Irene's parents had probably found the little English girl a desirable playmate for their daughter, and were kind and attentive to her in consequence, while Mr. Nixon and his wife had encouraged an intimacy that procured them much pleasant society. Though often, at a later period, separated for long intervals, the regard of the young girls had suffered no diminution, and about a year before Nora had left Germany she had spent some time with the Schaumbergs, and, as a parting service, had officiated as bridesmaid when Irene had married her cousin, the chief of another branch of their family. A correspondence of the most unreserved description had, in the course of time, slowly worn itself out. The brilliant and fashionable inmate of one of the gayest houses in Vienna could have but little in common with the solitary girl whose days were passed in reading, and the contemplation of the dingy vegetation of Russell Square. It gave Nora, however, sincere pleasure to hear that she should soon be so near the person who had supplied the place of sister to her, but her wish to remain unknown to Torp as long as possible, made her resolve to defer her inquiries about her friend for some time. While these thoughts passed through her mind, she closed the window in a manner to attract attention, and so effectually that, on opening it again soon afterwards, the speakers had left the orchard, and on the road near the

house she thought she perceived two figures sauntering slowly towards the banks of the Ammer.

The drums of the Ammergau musicians proclaimed the break of day. At a very early hour the next morning they beat a *réveille* through the whole village, which, with the sound of church bells entering Nora's room through the still open casement, wakened her and her companion most effectually, and about the time she had completed her toilet the band commenced playing in a manner to draw her irresistibly towards the window. As she stretched out her head in eager attention, two other heads from neighbouring windows were protruded also, for the same purpose no doubt, but while one determinately looked away, the other turned towards her to wish a cheerful 'good morning,' and to hope she had slept well.

'Thank you—quite well. Is the representation about to begin?'

'Not yet. But you ought to see the church and hear high mass: every one in the village who can sing will assist, and the performers in the drama consider it a duty to begin the day with Divine service.'

At this moment the peasant's wife appeared at the door and told Nora that she would find her breakfast and her brother in the room below.

Waldemar heard, and smilingly observed that brothers were not often so punctual, and he had rather begun to hope she would have required him as *cicerone*.



Early as it still was when John and Nora had breakfasted, they found the village streets crowded to excess, and hundreds of people already on their way to the theatre to secure places. John persuaded Nora to go there also, assuring her that from day-break the arrival of spectators had been incessant, and that no theatre could possibly contain them all.

Perhaps he was right—at all events figures in Oriental dresses and draperies began to flit about the village; groups of children assembled before the houses to have their costumes inspected; but the report of a cannon from the precincts of the theatre made all turn in that direction; and in the midst of a rather motley multitude, Nora and John found their way to the large enclosure formed by wooden planks, and alone remarkable from its enormous circumference.

A short flight of steps brought them into one of the boxes that were erected behind, and a little above the space that descended amphitheatrically to the orchestra, which contained seats for six thousand persons. The stage was of sufficient extent to suit this theatre, and the great drama about to be performed on it. There was a proscenium of considerable depth, and beyond it a closed theatre of smaller dimensions, for the representation of interior scenes, and tableaux from the Old Testament: and this theatre within a theatre had at each side a building, with balconies, joined by arches to the side-scenes

of the proscenium. Through these arches, two long streets of Jerusalem were constantly visible; and when the middle theatre was closed by its curtain, representing also a street in perspective, the whole formed a view of the city of Jerusalem.

Crowds of people soon began to pour in at all the entrances; and the various costumes of the different parts of Tyrol and Bavaria found numerous representatives, in the brightest and freshest colours. John found time to become an enthusiastic admirer of the black boddices, and fantastic head-dresses, of the women; while some vague ideas entered his mind, of procuring for himself one of those loose jackets and picturesque hats, that seemed to make 'the commonest fellows,' as he expressed it to Nora, 'look something like!' She paid little attention to his remarks, being at first too much occupied with the construction of the stage, and afterwards with the demeanour of the audience, as they defiled slowly between the benches, and reverentially took their places, as if in a church—even their greetings to each other were subdued; the men exchanged silent nods, the women whispered gravely, while spreading out their text-books, and seemed wholly occupied with the great drama about to be enacted.

It was curious that, on observing all this, Nora's doubts and scruples about the propriety of witnessing the representation returned in full force, and that she turned towards Torp, who, with Waldemar,

had taken a place in the adjacent box, to see if he shared her uneasiness. Leaning forward, with an elbow placed on his crossed knees, his chin resting on his hand, he gazed at the landscape beyond the theatre, with a calm earnestness that might perhaps have re-assured a less careful observer ; but Nora would just then have preferred seeing him watching the progress of Waldemar's rapid sketch of the classical stage with its proscenium, or interested in the groups of picturesque peasants standing immediately below him.

To Waldemar she would not speak : how could a Tyrolean, accustomed from infancy to see his Saviour represented in every possible way, pictorial and sculptural, understand the fear of profanation with which a living representative inspired her ? She herself believed she could, ten years previously, have taken her place among the spectators, with feelings of more curiosity and interest than uneasiness and awe. Familiar then with pictures and images of the crucified Redeemer, not only in churches and chapels, on the high-road, and beside the scarcely trodden woodland path, but in every cottage, in every house, almost in every dwelling-room, while lithographs of the same mild face might be shaken from among the leaves of most books of prayer, she would have found far less to shock her in the representation that now filled her mind with anxiety and dismay. She recalled to her

memory every argument that could tend to reassure her,—it would be but a succession of living pictures, she had heard they were eminently well-arranged, the performers were simple religious peasants, full of enthusiasm, deeply impressed with the necessity of fulfilling a solemn vow,\* and with intentions and objects as pure as could be found on earth.

As the echo of the last cannon was lost in the surrounding hills, the overture commenced. Soon after the chorus filled the proscenium, and all Nora's remaining scruples were absorbed in the most intense interest. The stage arrangements possessed all the charms of novelty to her, and, with the assistance of a text-book, she easily followed the leaders of the chorus, as, generally singing, but occasionally reciting, they explained the tableaux represented on the enclosed and smaller stage, or prepared the audience for the next act of the drama, while exhorting them to devotion and repentance.

And this chorus, so fantastically dressed in white tunics, coloured sandals, girdles, and mantles, with crown-like plumed head-dresses, soon became so familiar, as not in the least to detract from the

\* In the year 1633, when the village was visited by a devastating and contagious disorder, the monks of Ettal induced the parish to make a vow, 'That in thankful devotion, and for edifying contemplation, they would, every ten years, publicly represent the Passion of Jesus, the Saviour of the world.' Whereupon the parish that had made the vow was immediately freed from the pestilence.

reality given to all else by the bright daylight, the summer sky with its passing clouds, and the pasture-land, hills and woods, seen beyond the streets and above the houses of Jerusalem.

It would be difficult to describe Nora's feelings as the representative of Jesus appeared on the scene, but so completely did the person and manner of the artist performer satisfy her high wrought expectations, that dissatisfaction or disappointment was certainly not among them. She perceived instantly that what was then before her, would take the place of all the pictures and statues she had ever seen, and remain indelibly impressed on her mind for ever. It was, therefore, this one deeply interesting figure, with the pale face, finely chiselled features, and parted waving hair which has become typical, that she followed with breathless interest and anxiety throughout, and never did the eminence of the character of Christ strike her so forcibly, or the worthlessness of mankind, and the ignoble motives that are the springs of their actions become so glaringly apparent as on this occasion. The monologues of the principal actors, shewing the current of their thoughts without reserve, made each as it were a psychological study, yet so simple and forcible, as to be within the comprehension of the most illiterate among the audience. The sending of Jesus from one tribunal to another, the wish of those who knew his innocence to avoid the responsibility of his martyrdom, yet determination

that he should suffer, his being forsaken by every friend at the moment of danger, in short, all that habit enables us to read and hear read almost unmoved, and as a matter of history, was brought before Nora, with a force so perfectly irresistible, that, various and eloquent as had often been the sermons she had heard, excellent and celebrated as were the pictures she had seen, never had she been moved as on the present occasion. A sceptic might perhaps have followed the representation with criticizing curiosity, a less imaginative mind with calm self-possession, Nora forgot herself, time, place, spectators, everything, and saw, heard, and felt, with a vividness that at length completely overwhelmed her. As the crucifixion was completed a shudder of horror passed through her whole frame, a sensation of extreme cold seemed to chill her blood, and after some ineffectual efforts to control, at least outwardly, her emotion, she bent down her head and covered her face with her hands, remaining motionless, until roused by a whisper from Waldemar. 'Mademoiselle,' he said, 'allow me to advise you to leave the theatre now; another scene might weaken an impression well worth preserving in all its strength.'

Nora rose, looked back for a moment, saw the commencement of the removal from the cross, and soon after found herself outside the wooden building with Waldemar and John, both more tranquil than she had yet seen them, as they walked.

slowly beside her towards the silent and deserted village.

The pause at the end of the first four hours of the performance had been that day unusually short, in consequence of a threatening thunder storm, which, however, had greatly heightened the effect of the latter part of the drama, by the gloom cast on the scene from the darkening clouds and the incessant rolling of distant thunder. A favourable wind seemed now about to waft the storm away from Ammergau, and leave the evening sky clear and cloudless.

Followed by Torp at a distance, which his curiosity to hear what they were saying induced him by degrees to lessen, Waldemar and Nora reached the cottage, which they had left much about the same time in the morning. The door was open, and Nora entered, turning into the little sitting-room, while Waldemar, instead of following, remained outside, and leaning on the window-sill looked into the room, apparently continuing their conversation when he observed, 'So you have no curiosity—no wish—to see Pflunger? Not even when I can assure you that you will not be at all disappointed by a nearer acquaintance with him? His resemblance to the pictures of our Saviour does not lose in the least by close observation, and there is even something in his manner which accords perfectly with all our preconceived ideas. Let me delay my departure for an hour and take you to his house.'

‘No, thank you,’ said Nora, quickly, ‘not for any consideration would I see him in another dress. I intend to forget that he exists otherwise than as he appeared to me this day. Not even ten years hence would I desire to witness this great drama again; he will then most probably have lost in appearance some of his present eminent advantages, and I wish to preserve the impression made on me to-day as pure as may be, and as long as possible.’

Waldemar seemed to consider this conclusive; he raised his hat without speaking another word, and followed the evidently impatient Torp, who, having caught a glimpse of John advancing to meet him, had begun to stride towards the village in a more resolute than civil manner.



## CHAPTER III.

## ALMENAU.

NORA was perfectly sincere in what she had said to Waldemar, for, much as the artist peasants of Ammergau had interested her, she was so unwilling to weaken the impression of what she had just witnessed by a personal acquaintance with any of the actors of the drama, that she used all her influence to induce her uncle to leave the village without delay. Her account of the classical arrangements of the theatre, its immense dimensions, the hundreds of actors and thousands of spectators, joined to a performance that had lasted eight hours without producing a moment's lassitude, made Georgina half regret her absence ; but Mr. Nixon continued to condemn, in terms of the strongest censure, what he called 'the whole concern ;' he would not listen to any explanations, and on reference being made to pictures and statues declared equally strongly his objections to either in churches, never failing, during their journey of the succeeding days, to express his serious disapprobation of every shrine of the Madonna, or way-side crucifix, that they passed. The wax and wooden images which

abounded in the small inns where they stopped to dine or sleep he pronounced an abomination, treating with contempt Nora's quotation from Goethe, that they served perhaps occasionally to recal wide wandering thoughts, and turn them into a higher and better channel.

Travelling for the first time in his life, and strongly imbued with every description of English prejudice, Mr. Nixon found much to surprise, still more to condemn, in all he saw; but Nora perceived, with secret satisfaction, that the scenery was beginning to make an impression on him that she had scarcely ventured to expect. He first 'allowed' that the country itself was 'well enough,' then he admitted that the woods were very extensive, and the mountains high and picturesque, and ended by acknowledging that the scenery was grand, very grand. 'But he had always known that Tyrol abounded in mountains, on the map it was quite black with them.'

'This is not Tyrol!' exclaimed Nora, for the hundredth time, 'we are in the Bavarian highlands.'

'Well, well,' he answered testily, 'it's all the same you know to us; but having seen this sort of thing, I'm glad to think that we too have highlands—very. Nora, you're very clever, but you'll not be able to show me anything here that we have not at home—and better.'

'Woods and forests for instance!' said Nora,

laughing; 'however, as my knowledge of England is chiefly derived from books, and your's of Germany from maps, we had better not attempt a discussion.'

What resemblance to England there might be in the beautiful country through which they were travelling, Nora knew not, and could therefore make no mental comparison. She gazed with profound admiration at the vast extent of forest that covered long ranges of mountains; for Almenau was essentially a forest district, and the road as it approached the village, formed in the side of a mountain, presented a wall of blasted stone on one hand, while on the other, a wooded precipice descended to a foaming torrent that forced its way boisterously through, and over masses of rock. Innumerable Alpine plants still flowered luxuriantly wherever the dark heath-mould could find a resting-place, and nothing as yet marked the approach towards autumn.

The windings of the road brought various changes; sometimes an opening shewed the rocky-pointed or rugged summits of the mountains, that had appeared far distant but a few hours before, now quite close to them, at others, enclosed in wood, an occasional glade gave an opportunity of admiring the foliage of the beech, birch, and maple, that seemed to have replaced the pine in every sheltered nook. On reaching the top of a long ascent, where on a guide-post the words,

‘ Drag chain, or fine,’ were printed in large letters beneath a sketch of something greatly resembling a ploughshare, the postilions having descended and commenced a clattering with chains beneath the carriage, totally indifferent to the courier’s entreaties, in broken German, that they would not injure the wheels, Nora learned, between their mutterings about the monstrous weight and proportions of the carriage, that the journey was drawing to a close, and that the next village was Almenau.

Directly before her lay a valley with a river winding through it, and bounded on each side by wooded mountains, beyond which she saw still higher with summits of stone, and still further distant than these last, others partially covered with snow. A tall pointed church steeple formed the middle of the view, denoting the site of the village, and on reaching that part of the road which partially followed the course of the river, some isolated cottages already formed a sort of suburb to it.

‘ Well now — aw — really — all this — is very pretty,’ observed Mr. Nixon.

‘ Whose place is that?’ asked Georgina, with more than usual animation, as she caught a glimpse of a large building close beside a small but picturesque lake, on the calm waters of which the golden coloured clouds were distinctly reflected.

‘It’s the brewery,’ said the postilion, on being questioned, and Nora, as usual, interpreted.

‘But there is a church with Gothic windows and a belfry.’

‘He says it was a monastery in former times,’ explained Nora.

‘I declare I should not at all dislike living there,’ continued Georgina. ‘What beautiful trees! and those little promontories running into the lake make it so pretty! I wonder is there a good neighbourhood here!’

‘In that case perhaps you would marry the brewer?’ suggested John.

Georgina threw back her head, and smiled disdainfully.

‘If this place, or anything similar, is to be sold,’ said Nora, ‘I shall be tempted to purchase it, and remain here for the rest of my life.’

‘You are not serious, Nora?’ asked Mr. Nixon, gravely.

‘Perfectly, I assure you,’ she answered; ‘but I shall not be in a hurry, for I might perhaps prefer that ruined castle on the hill. You, who understand so perfectly the state of my affairs, will be able to tell me if I can afford to rebuild as well as purchase it.’

‘I should rather have expected to hear you talk in this way ten years ago,’ began Mr. Nixon, seriously, ‘but after having resided so long in England—’

‘So long in Russell Square, you mean,’ said Nora, interrupting him, laughingly; ‘I know nothing of England—but a great deal about such places as this; and even if I return to London with you, I am afraid you will never be able to persuade me to remain long there.’

‘I perceive that you will marry a foreigner, and desert us altogether, Nora.’

‘Let me assure you that I have no thought of marriage at present, though a very strong desire to have a home of my own somewhere or other. By that lake for instance, or on that hill, in the valley of the Inn, or—or—anywhere provided I can look at such mountains as these, and feel young again! What wonderful castles in the air I used to build in such places, with my mother, when I was a child! I wish,’ she added, with a sigh, ‘I wish she were now alive, and able to join me in the more solid kind of architecture in which I may soon be tempted to indulge.’

The road had turned from the river, the valley widened perceptibly, the houses, with their long fancifully painted wooden balconies, and their overhanging shingle-covered roofs secured from the ravages of storm by large stones placed at irregular distances upon them, seemed to draw closer to each other, until they were at length merely separated by their respective orchards, or a clump of old trees; yet so little appearance of what

might be called a street was visible, that they were all a good deal surprised when the carriage drew up before a house perfectly similar to the others in form, though on a much larger scale. It was the inn, and presented a large gable with double balconies, to the road; looked very freshly white-washed, very spacious, and very clean; and a very stout landlady with a good-humoured face, and rosy cheeks, advanced towards them, while the ostler in his linen apron, red waistcoat, black velveteen jacket, and tasselled cap, busied himself about the horses.

The necessary questions about rooms were asked, and Georgina not a little astonished when informed that she could not have the number she required, and that there was not a single private sitting-room in the whole house! Nora explained in vain that there was a parlour little used by strangers during the day, and that people passed their time chiefly in the open air in summer; and she pointed across the road to a grass garden where, under the shade of luxuriant chestnut and lime trees, tables and benches of every size were arranged, while a long many-windowed wooden building, equally well furnished, had been erected in continuation of an enclosure for the favourite game of skittles.

Georgina shook her head and murmured something about the impossibility of existing without a

drawing-room; but she descended from the carriage and followed Nora into the house. At one side of the broad passage where they entered there was the parlour mentioned by Nora, containing tables covered with green oil cloth, glazed cupboards filled with china and silver, a row of pegs for the hanging up of hats on the wall, numerous portraits of the royal family in black frames, and—a guitar. On the other side a wide open door permitted a full view of the capacious peasants' room, where at some of the numerous deal tables about fifteen or twenty men were drinking their evening tankard of beer, and at intervals singing loudly in chorus. Here John remained, while the others ascended the broad staircase, preceded by the landlady jingling a monstrous bunch of keys. She passed by the rooms on the first floor, observing to Nora that they had been engaged some days previously by Count Waldemar Benndorff, and his friend Milor Torp.

These last words Georgina understood, and Torp himself had not been more amused when he heard of Milor Nixon, than she now was. 'I think,' she said, laughing, 'I think, Nora, we must give him strawberry leaves, and call him the Marquis of Carabbas—he really seems to be everywhere.'

The landlady, proud of her house and its capacious corridors, could not resist the temptation



to show her ball-room and its adjoining apartments to the strangers, and Georgina would willingly have taken one of the latter for a drawing-room, notwithstanding its bare walls and want of proper furniture, had she not been informed that these rooms were required for weddings and other festivities, and that the church consecration fête was to be celebrated in them before long. Nora, who interpreted, added, 'I shall resign whatever room I may get to you, to-morrow, Georgina, as I have been offered a lodging at the forester's house, which is close by, and will be a much quieter place than the inn; and now let us lose no more time, for I wish to go to the churchyard before it is dark.'

On a well chosen prominent spot in the midst of the village stood the large massively built church, with its high, pointed, green steeple. An ascent of several stone steps, and a wooden gate, led to it and the churchyard, which was enclosed by a low wall, and appeared tolerably full of monuments both in stone and iron. The wish to be remembered, talked of, and thought of after death, seems much stronger in Germany than in England, and manifests itself in the churchyard of the most insignificant hamlets. Not only the innkeeper, smith, miller, and other leading families of the villages, have their burying places furnished with handsome monuments, in or near the walls of the

church, but every peasant in the neighbourhood who makes any pretension to being well off, possesses likewise his burying ground, more or less furnished with ornament, and all carefully tended by the survivors. The most common monument is in the form of a cross, frequently of iron, painted, varnished, and gilt; on a plate of copper, in the centre of the cross, one often sees, painted in oil, a miniature full-length portrait of the peasant whose body is mouldering beneath the turf; the figure generally kneeling with clasped hands, gazing upwards at a Madonna or an ascending figure of the Saviour. If the village painter be skilful, or chance sends a wandering artist to the neighbourhood who will undertake such work, the whole peasant family appear kneeling side by side—no great demand for striking resemblance in the portraits being made on such occasions, or any artistical arrangement considered necessary. The dead and living take the places assigned them by custom—father and mother generally somewhat apart, their offspring before them placed according to size, like organ pipes, and sometimes as background a rather incongruous pillar and red curtain, which latter being draped aside discloses a view of the village with its church and surrounding mountains. English eyes resting on such a picture would scarcely be able to discover that those represented with hands clasping a crucifix, were deceased, the

other members of the family alive, at least at the time the picture in question was painted.

The churchyard at Almenau possessed many such pictures; they were not new to Nora, yet she lingered beside them—read the long epitaph of the maiden Marie Maier, rich in virtue and honour—stooped to decipher the name of the infant represented being borne in swaddling clothes on the arms of a bright winged angel to heaven—and even glanced at the unusually numerous triangles in which an eye of large dimensions was used as an emblem of the Supreme Being, until the eyes, many of which were newly and well painted, seemed to turn and watch her as she at length moved slowly towards the grave she had travelled so far to visit. It was, as had been described to her, somewhat apart from the others, and on a black wooden tablet, a couple of feet above the surface of the ground, and already partially hid by the long rank grass that grew wildly around it, she read the name of Arthur Nixon, and the date of his demise.

Having pulled up by the roots some offensively luxuriant weeds, she held them unconsciously in her hand, while memory brought Arthur before her with all his worldly ambition, his self-made cares and sorrows, disappointments and early death. The end of all a few feet of earth—not more than

was accorded to the poorest peasant in Almenau! Yet he had chosen well when he had desired to rest in that peaceful churchyard, for a more lovely spot could scarcely be imagined. Slight as was the elevation, it sufficed to render visible the course of the river, and to give a view into an adjacent valley, the mountains of which formed distances that would have delighted a painter, while through an opening in them the setting sun cast a long bright parting ray of light on the village and its old church, lingering on Arthur's grave, as Nora observed, with a sort of fanciful superstitious pleasure, for some time after shade had fallen on the others.

At length the sun disappeared, but the summits of the mountains continued to glow in fiery light, changing imperceptibly in colour, and apparently reflecting on their rocky heights the gorgeous hues of the evening sky, where red deepened into crimson, with which the darkening blue of the sky mixed, producing various shades of violet that in their turn were lost in the neutral tint of night. Before this last change Nora had felt the light evening breeze that in fine weather invariably blows from the mountains to the plain, heard the rustling of leaves in the not distant wood, saw groups of labourers returning from their work, and was slowly roused from the meditations suggested by the place in which she stood, and the magnificent scenery

around it, by the approach of a noisy party of peasants, who, with some sunburnt merry girls, passed through the churchyard on their way home. The laughter ceased, and the loud voices were hushed when they entered the hallowed place: while some walked gravely on, others dispersed to visit the graves that were the object of their constant pious care. One strongly-built healthy-looking girl drew near the place where Nora stood—on her arm a wreath of fresh ivy, and in her hand a bunch of bright blue cornflowers bound together by the stalk of a still green ear of wheat. For a few seconds she stood with downcast eyes and moving lips beside an iron cross, and then prepared to decorate it. The cornflowers had already found a place in the little receptacle for water, and the wreath of ivy was being raised in both hands when her eyes fell on Nora, and in a moment she guessed that she was the person who was expected to visit the grave of the Englishman. Moved either by Nora's dejected countenance, or a feeling of regret that the stranger's grave should be found in a condition of such obvious neglect, the girl advanced awkwardly, and after a moment's hesitation shyly placed the ivy wreath so as to form a frame to the space containing Arthur's name and the date of his death.

'Thank you,' said Nora, warmly, 'I am very much obliged to you, for I have just been regretting that there was no one here to decorate this

grave with a few flowers occasionally. It must in future be better cared for than during the year that is past.'

'I think it may be something more than a year since he was buried here,' said the girl, using her reaping-hook to remove the long grass from the grave. 'They say the first thing he did the evening he came to the village was to walk to the churchyard here and admire the view from it; and when he was taken ill next day, and there was no hope of his getting better, he said they must bury him at this side near the wall, and that there was *one* who he knew would come to see his grave and have it taken care of, and that's you, of course.'

Nora bent her head. Arthur had evidently attached great importance to the performance of her promise—perhaps he had stood where she was then standing and thought of her. Large tears gathered in her eyes, and, falling on the mound before her, she unconsciously fulfilled his last request as completely as he could have desired.

When she looked up she was alone, but she heard the sound of joyous voices and children's laughter from the nearest houses, mixed with the distant bark of dogs and the tinkling bells of cattle driven out to graze in the woods.

Nora was certainly not a strong-minded woman, for she left the churchyard rejoicing that Arthur's grave was within reach of all these cheerful sounds.

## CHAPTER IV.

## SAINT BENEDICT'S AND ITS INHABITANTS.

GEORGINA was made happy the next day by Nora's resignation of her apartment, which was immediately converted into a sitting-room. Its large dimensions and fine windows made it appear but scantily furnished when divested of everything but its hard sofa, six chairs, round table, and looking-glass between the windows, placed so high that it nearly touched the ceiling, where it slanted forwards in a manner to render it just possible to obtain a glimpse into it from some distant parts of the room. In vain had Nora pleaded the cause of a massive chest of drawers with brass ornaments, and a glass cupboard filled with all that was most precious in the house of gilt china and silver spoons. Georgina wondered how she could think of having such things in a drawing-room.

'But,' suggested Nora, 'you could put your books on the drawers, and your worsted-work into them.'

'I rather expect,' said Georgina, 'that our landlady will find me some furniture when she sees the room so completely destitute of every comfort.'

Nora shook her head. 'You had better ask at once for a few tables and benches from the ball-room,' she said, smiling, 'for if you will not dine in the garden or the parlour, like other people, this one table, though large, will scarcely answer for working and writing, breakfasting, dining, and—'

'I see, I see,' cried Georgina. 'Yes, we must have in the deal tables; they will be very ugly, but very convenient; and as we are not likely to have any visitors, it is of little importance of what wood they are made. I hope *you* have got a comfortable room at the forester's. Had you no difficulty in making your arrangements with the family?'

'None whatever. They have a spare room, and even proposed my breakfasting in the garden, where there is an arbour, or on the balcony. The temptation is strong, it would so remind me of old times.'

'Oh, Nora, this will never do! If you do not come here every morning papa will be angry with me, and say it is because I have turned you out of your room.'

'I intend to come here every day to luncheon,' said Nora, 'but in case of rain, it may suit me to remain at the forester's in the morning. Besides, I shall probably sometimes be absent, as I intend to make excursions to all the lakes, waterfalls, and alps in the neighbourhood, and hope to induce you to join me in most of them, though, as you



have never lived in a country like this, you can form no idea of the longing that I feel to be again in such places.'

No answer was made, for the attention of both, as they leaned together out of the window, was just then attracted by a light carriage, or rather cart, that drove rapidly up to the inn door. There was a sort of cabriolet seat in front, and a peasant driver was perched on its foot-board, his feet hanging in trustful proximity to the hind legs of a horse that seemed to have been taken from the plough or some such agricultural occupation, and forced into the service of a couple of hunters, in whom, notwithstanding their change of costume, it was easy to recognise Torp and Waldemar.

'I wonder who, or rather what, that man is!' exclaimed Georgina, as Torp sprang to the ground, accoutred in English shooting habilaments of unimpeachable correctness.

'I think his companion infinitely more interesting,' said Nora; 'he is just now one of the most picturesque-looking men I have seen for a long time.'

'You mean the artist? Well I confess he does look handsome and even gentlemanlike, though he is dressed completely like a peasant.'

'Rather like a forester or hunter,' said Nora.

'But,' continued Georgina, 'I have seen several peasants pass the inn this morning with precisely such grey jackets as his, and you see he has

a green hat and naked knees, and nailed shoes, and even a leather belt with letters upon it!

‘The baldric or broad belt was formerly worn as a distinguishing badge by persons of high station,’ observed Nora, smiling. ‘Suppose now, he were a prince in disguise—’

‘Nonsense, Nora.’

‘Or a nobleman of high degree,’ persisted Nora, laughingly; ‘let me, at all events, advise you not to judge too rashly of the station of men in a dress such as he now wears, while you are in the Bavarian highlands;—it is popular in the mountains here, and I have seen odd mistakes made from too hastily drawn conclusions.’

The innkeeper, his wife, a couple of waitresses with black bodices into which silver spoons were thrust as badges of office, and some labourers about to return to their work, now gathered round the carriage, and began to peep, one after the other, underneath a cloth of green baize spread over something that was laid in the cart-like back of the vehicle, and which from its uneven surface excited their curiosity in no common degree. Waldemar threw aside the cloth and disclosed a large roebuck and a chamois; the graceful head of the latter he raised, and pointing to a scarcely perceptible wound in it, observed, with a commendatory nod to Torp, ‘Not a bad shot for an Englishman!’

Now Torp was in all probability exceedingly

pleased, but Englishmen generally think it dignified to conceal their feelings or moderate the expression of them, so, with the imperturbability of a North-American Indian, he turned away while Waldemar good-humouredly expatiated on the difficulties they had encountered, and the excellence of the shot, to John Nixon and his father, who had left the garden to join them, dwelling especially on the fact that the chamois had been brought down by a rifle, and at a distance of at least a hundred and fifty paces!

Mr. Nixon, to whom this last remark sounded rather ambiguous, inasmuch as he had never in the course of his life had a rifle in his hand, perceived, nevertheless, that surprise and admiration on his part were expected, and therefore murmured some of those ejaculations in which the English language abounds.

‘Aw—ah—exactly! Well—really now! Ah—to be sure—aw—capital—hem—famous!’

John wished for further information, but unwilling to be overheard by Torp, moved quite close to Waldemar, and leaning on the back of the cart, pretended to examine the chamois, while he observed in a low voice, ‘Well, now, I should have thought it was pretty much the same thing, whether rifle or fowling-piece were used.’

‘By no means,’ said Waldemar; ‘there is a great difference between one shot and another.’

Surely you would rather hit and kill with a bullet, like a good marksman, than perhaps make an ugly wound or mangle with a discharge of shot, and—'

'Oh I see, I understand,' cried John, 'I am not a bad shot at a target, or—pigeons, and am sure I should enjoy this deer-stalking amazingly; it must be capital sport in such a country as this, and I wish you would let me go out with you next time!'

Torp's ears were as good as his eyes; before Waldemar could answer, he called out impatiently, 'Come, come, Waldemar, let's have something to eat; you seem to forget that you have been complaining of hunger for the last two hours!'

Waldemar turned to the garden, while Torp, stretching himself at full length on one of the wooden benches, added in German, 'If you intend to invite that youth to go out with you, let me know in proper time, that I may take my fishing-rod and seek amusement elsewhere, for I strongly suspect he is more likely to shoot one of us than anything else.'

These words were spoken so deliberately and distinctly that they were heard by the forester and his son as they approached the inn, and both smiled significantly, while unceremoniously removing the chamois from John Nixon's sight. Nora too had heard, and thought to herself, 'Is it worth that man's while being so very ill-natured and rude to us?' and then she called from the window to John,

who instantly ran into the house and up stairs to her.

‘Did you understand what was said?’ she asked, as he took his sister’s place beside her at the window.

‘Not exactly all the words,’ he answered; ‘but it is very evident that this Mr. Torp is a disobliging, disagreeable fellow, and won’t let the other be civil to us. I must now try to make up to the forester and his son, and if they cannot or will not give me a day’s sport, I shall borrow a gun from some one here, and go out deerstalking by myself.’

‘No, Jack, you must not do any such thing,’ cried Nora, quickly; ‘that would be turning wild hunter, and you might run a chance of being shot yourself!’

‘Oh I don’t imagine the danger is so great after all,’ said John, ‘and wild hunting sounds uncommonly tempting.’

‘Call it poaching, then,’ said Nora.

‘No I won’t—because you see there is a fellow here who will help me if I ask him. He was just outside the village breaking a horse this morning, and rode so well that I asked about him, and heard that he had been six years in a cuirassier regiment, and was now a free man as they call it, to the great vexation of the foresters in the neighbourhood, as he is, or was, a notorious *wild-shoots*.’

‘You mean Long Seppel from the Craggs,’ said Nora, ‘but I can tell you he is not likely to

attempt anything of that kind now for many reasons, so you had better leave it to me to speak to the forester for you. I have got a room at his house, and can easily find out what he can do for you, and when this Mr. Torp is likely to be out of the way. In the mean time you must take some walks with me, and perhaps my uncle and Georgy may be tempted to join us.'

Immediately after their early dinner, or luncheon, as Georgina chose to call it, Adam brought the letters and newspapers that had accumulated for them under the address '*poste restante*' at the neighbouring town; they afforded occupation for a couple of hours, and it was late in the afternoon before Nora could persuade her uncle to walk to Saint Benedict's, the secularized monastery, with an extensive brewery, the situation of which beside a small lake, and almost completely surrounded by wooded mountains, had so greatly pleased them the day before.

Their way led them along the banks of a clear stream, in which, from time to time, they could see small trout darting backwards and forwards in all directions, which so interested Mr. Nixon and his son that they spent nearly an hour in watching and waiting and poking long sticks under the banks to dislodge the fish hiding, or supposed to be hiding there.

They all stopped on a bridge of planks where a

boy of about twelve years old stood fishing, with a rod of such simple structure that John could not repress a loud 'Bravo!' as almost immediately after they drew near him he flung a tolerably large trout on the grass.

The young angler was not alone; beside him stood a man in the prime of life, but what his station in the world might be it was at first difficult to guess, as his toilet gave no clue whatever to it. His head was covered by a straw hat of the same materials as those worn by the reapers in the neighbouring fields, nor was it in much better condition than the most of them, being rather dingy and of uncertain form; a black kerchief was very carelessly slung round his throat: he wore one of the loose grey jackets that seemed to be common to all ranks; and his trousers, of the same rather coarse material, were nevertheless carefully turned up above his nailed shoes to prevent them from being injured by the marshy ground or water into which he occasionally splashed with perfect unconcern. The boy called him Ernst, and danced round him while he disengaged the struggling fish and arranged another bait upon the angle, which consisted merely of a piece of twine fastened to the end of a still green branch of hazel-wood.

Mr. Nixon's knowledge of fish was confined to a market or a dinner-table; of the art of angling he was utterly ignorant, but it seemed to be such

child's play in that clear shallow brook that he was suddenly seized with a desire to become a fisherman, and accordingly advanced with an air of grave interest to look on; while John, in execrable German, wondered that anything could be done with such miserable tackle: he supposed fish must be very plenty thereabouts.

'We are not badly off,' replied Ernst, in very good French; 'the streams have small fry such as this, the river below the village large trout and greylings, and the lake is well stocked with carp, pike, and so forth.'

Nora interpreted to her uncle, but no sooner had the stranger heard her speak English than he turned to Mr. Nixon and said, with a smile, 'If you are a fisherman you can have much sport here—but Englishman fisherman—fisherman Englishman—is all the same.'

'Why—yes—I believe we *are* considered pretty good in that line, but for my own part I have never thought it worth while to fish; the London markets afford such choice and variety that, aw—a man is not likely to think of providing for his table himself, as he might be obliged to do here.'

The stranger looked at him with some wonder, and suggested that the sport was generally the strongest inducement.

'Well perhaps you are right. I can imagine it a pleasant enough sort of pastime in such a place



as this, and confess I should like to try my hand at it.'

'In that case,' said the other, 'I may venture to offer you the fishing of this stream and the lake during the time you remain in this neighbourhood.'

'You are very kind—very liberal indeed!' said Mr. Nixon.

'Not at all,' said Ernst, giving his young companion his rod again, and directing him where to throw it, 'not at all, for were you what the English call a "complete angler," I should probably not have made the offer. One a year is as much as I can permit here, and there is now at Almenau an Englishman—'

'Mr. Torp?' said John.

'That was not the name—the note, I think, mentioned a Lord somebody.'

'Oh they call him Lord Torp at the inn—'

'And is he not a Lord?' asked Ernst, turning round.

'Not he!' answered John, laughing ironically, 'not more Lord Torp than I am Lord Nixon. Titles are not so plenty in England as in Germany!'

'I suppose you know him well?' said Ernst, half interrogatively.

'No—not at all—and I don't want to,' replied John, with ill-concealed pique.

'Very odd—very odd—,' murmured the other.

‘The English, when they meet in a foreign country, always seem to avoid and dislike each other! Now Monsieur Torp,’ he added, laughing, ‘will perhaps say just the same thing of you when he comes here to-morrow.’

‘Very likely,’ replied John. ‘I don’t myself think there is much love lost between us.’

‘It is not improbable,’ observed Mr. Nixon, rather pompously, ‘that this Mr. Torp is a highly respectable person, but we do not know him; he has not moved in our circle in London, and the name is utterly unknown to us; his friend, the young German artist, made altogether a pleasanter impression on us!’

‘Do you mean Bendorff?’

‘They call him Waldemar,’ said Mr. Nixon, ‘my son says he is quite a gentleman.’

‘I should think he was,’ replied Ernst, almost laughing.

As he spoke they reached the high road from Almenau to the monastery, and at a short distance perceived, advancing towards them, the two men of whom they had been speaking.

Nora prepared herself to hear Torp presented to their new acquaintance by his true name, and to see the change which she did not for a moment doubt it would produce in the manner and conduct of all her relations, but John hurried forward, saying, ‘Let us go on and look at the monastery church

that the people in the village talk so much about.'

'Must we not ask permission to see it?' asked Georgina, speaking for the first time.

'By no means,' answered the stranger, stopping to let them pass him, 'our churches are always open.'

He raised his hat, and then turned to meet Waldemar and Torp.

'Now who may that man be?' soliloquized John, as soon as they were alone.

'The proprietor of the monastery or his son,' said Nora.

'That is, you suppose him to be either the brewer himself or the brewer's son and heir?'

'Yes.'

'Might he not be the steward or book-keeper?'

'Certainly not,' said Georgina, with more than usual decision.

John laughed. 'Well, do you know I took him, in the first instance, for something of that kind, and as to Georgy, I am sure his hat and hob-nailed shoes disgusted her at once, to say nothing of the way in which he stood in the water and washed his hands. I have known her call a man vulgar for less.'

'And yet,' said Georgina, 'I suspect I discovered that he was a gentleman before you did.'

‘Because he spoke French, perhaps? but I can tell you that is a common accomplishment here. However, whatever he may be, he seemed very much inclined to be civil, and I dare say would have shown us all over the place if that Torp had not, as usual, come in our way.’

They turned from the lake towards the church, the entrance to which was through one of those carved stone Byzantine portals, with mysterious combinations of human figures and animals, that are supposed to represent the triumph of Christianity over paganism; and having found the door wide open, to admit the warm air from without, they wandered up and down the long aisles, looking at the pictures and monuments, altars and curiously-carved confessionals, until their attention was attracted by a noise in the gallery, and on looking up towards the organ, they perceived Waldemar, Torp, and their new acquaintance, striding over the musicians’ benches until they reached the front row, where, seating themselves, a whispered conversation began, which, from the direction of their eyes, Nora strongly suspected was as much about her relations and herself, as the church of St. Benedict’s.

She had been much pleased at the permission to fish given so unrestrictedly to her uncle; had even begun to indulge a hope that John would, in the course of time, be allowed to shoot on the grounds

belonging to the monastery; and now she beheld her enemy pouring his English prejudices into the ears of the attentively listening Ernst, and, in all probability, obliterating any agreeable impression that she and her relatives might perchance have made on him a quarter of an hour previously.

This time Nora did Torp injustice; he had not spoken until Ernst had made direct inquiries, giving, as a reason, that he wished to be civil to the travellers, and show them the monastery, but considered it necessary to ascertain that they were people who might be introduced to his mother and sister, who happened just then to be at home.

Torp's answer seemed to amuse more than enlighten, when he observed, that he believed them to be highly respectable people, but, as they did not exactly move in the same circle as his family in England, he had never chanced to see them until a few days ago.

'The fact is, you know nothing about them,' said Ernst, laughing; 'and I had better reserve the acquaintance for myself, and show them our cells and corridors some other day. If I had considered a moment, I should not have questioned you; for how could you give me information concerning a family who, I had already ascertained, knew nothing of you—not even your name?'

'They have not yet heard it properly pronounced,' replied Torp; 'nor is it necessary that

they should. I consider it quite a fortunate circumstance that Waldemar has furnished me with so short and insignificant a *nom-de-guerre*, and you will much oblige me by not entering into any explanations on the subject with any one, especially with any member of this English family. I believe I must add that, though personally unacquainted with these Nixons, they are not altogether unknown to me, and you need have no hesitation in presenting them to either your mother or sister.'

'But,' said Ernst, hesitatingly, 'a day can make no great difference; and my people are going to-morrow to spend a week or two with the Bendorffs, at Herrenburg in the Valley of the Inn. Waldemar has perhaps told you that his brother Carl has long been engaged to my sister, and their marriage is to take place next month. Carl and I have served many years in the same regiment; we always applied for leave of absence at the same time; he preferred spending his with us, instead of going home, and, as a matter of course, fell in love with my sister. Their engagement has caused great intimacy between our family and the Bendorffs; and if it had not been for Waldemar's arrival, I should have left St. Benedict's to-morrow with the others. I mention this to convince you that I really do remain here on his account and yours, and therefore wish you would both take up your quarters with me as I proposed.'

‘Thank you,’ said Torp, ‘I should have accepted your offer, were I not likely to be here for several weeks; and before I leave Almenau your house will be so full of wedding guests that you would scarcely know where to put me.’

‘We have plenty of cells,’ answered Ernst, laughing; ‘and the only person we expect who requires more than a reasonable quantity of room, is the Countess Schaumberg; she generally travels with so many servants, and horses, and dogs, that she overwhelms quiet people such as we are. To do her justice, however, she puts aside some of her grandeur when with us, and can be very charming when she chooses to please, as you know perhaps better than I do, for no friend of Waldemar’s could avoid intimacy with the Schaumbergs.’

‘Yet it was through them that I became acquainted with *him*,’ said Torp, smiling; ‘their house was one of the pleasantest in Vienna, and Waldemar almost lived with them!’

‘That was natural enough,’ rejoined Ernst, ‘as he and Schaumberg had been educated together, and were like brothers. Waldemar is now guardian to the Countess’s daughter; and I suppose it is in consequence of that, and his intimacy with her, that, directly after she became a widow, people said he was engaged to be married to her. At all events, I know he likes her, and the sooner she comes here the better pleased he will be.’

‘I don’t know that,’ said Torp, looking towards Waldemar, and smiling, as he observed him leaning eagerly forward, forgetful of their presence, and wholly occupied with the persons moving about in the church beneath. ‘I rather think that until Waldemar is actually affianced or married, he will always contrive to find some one to interest him, or, as he says himself, some one to whom he can lend his heart for a few weeks occasionally.’

‘One of these, perhaps?’ said Ernst, looking significantly downwards.

Torp nodded. ‘That one standing at the door,’ he said; ‘and now, if you feel disposed to show these people your monastery, Herr von Falkner, let me again assure you, that there is nothing whatever to prevent you from introducing them to your mother and sister, should chance bring them together. In the mean time Waldemar must take me to your father.’

Ernst called Waldemar, and having shown him a door leading from the gallery into the interior of the building, he himself descended by a narrow staircase to the church, whence he followed and overtook the Nixons, just as they reached the court in which the principal entrance to the monastery was situated.

Unconscious that any one was near them, Nora observed, that this part of the building seemed of much later date than the church, and was neither



very ancient nor very modern, as far as she could judge. She believed she was rather disappointed—the monastery certainly looked better when seen from the road, with its dark background and pretty lake.

Mr. Nixon said it was a prodigious pile of stone, and would require monastic revenues to keep so many different buildings, and such an extent of roof in order—to say nothing of the innumerable windows!

John thought it must be a confoundedly gloomy sort of barrack inside.

Georgina pronounced it an interesting, fine old place, and declared she should have no objection whatever to live in it.

‘Perhaps you would like to see the interior,’ said Ernst, who was so close beside her that she started, and left it to the others to accept his offer.

They did so eagerly enough, and followed him as he mounted a handsome stone staircase—their impressions with respect to the immense proportions of the building being confirmed on seeing long, wide, well-lighted corridors branching off in different directions. The one through which they were conducted was decorated with well-painted coats-of-arms, and led to several large, lofty, but simply-furnished apartments; a long row of cells had been converted into bed-rooms, but did not seem to be at present in use; and there were apparently endless suites of apartments quite unoccupied. There was

a handsome library, without books; and a music-room, or rather hall, of beautiful proportions, with marble pillars, paintings in fresco, elaborate stucco-work ornaments, and church-like windows, of which the upper parts were of painted glass. The only furniture of this room was a marble fountain, at the end opposite the windows; and Georgina, after expressing unqualified admiration of the apartment, could not help adding, that she wondered it had not become the favourite resort of the whole family.

‘My mother thinks it too large for our small household,’ said Ernst, ‘and in fact we only occupy ten or twelve rooms at the lake side when we are alone.’

‘Is it long since you purchased the place?’ asked Mr. Nixon.

‘It has been in our possession as far back as my recollection reaches.’

‘Then I suppose you cannot tell me what the value of a property of this kind may be?’

‘I fear I must refer you to my father,’ answered Ernst; ‘the woods and brewery make it rather valuable, but both have long been greatly mismanaged, as until a couple of years ago we never resided here.’

‘The—vicinity of the brewery—was not agreeable perhaps?’ suggested Georgina.

‘Oh, not at all!’ answered Ernst. ‘Brewing is a very good business in Bavaria, and my father has

quite a predilection for it, but until very lately he was in active service in the Austrian army: I have also been many years a soldier, and could only get a few weeks' leave of absence occasionally, so there was no one to attend properly to our affairs here, and the place was going to ruin as fast as possible.'

While speaking they had reached the cloisters that were open towards a small court, in the midst of which a fountain played in the almost eternal shade of the surrounding buildings, throwing showers of light drops beyond its stone cistern on the dark grass around.

Here Nora and Georgina stopped, while Ernst, springing lightly up a few stone steps, threw open the nearest door, saying, 'This is my cell: here I do penance for my sins on rainy days.'

Mr. Nixon and John followed him, and found so much to interest and amuse them that a considerable time elapsed before they again made their appearance; when they did so they were supplied with fishing-rods, and Nora heard with infinite satisfaction an appointment made for the next day at the trout stream near the lake.

They passed soon after through a garden: at one end of it was an arbour close to the lake, and two ladies were sitting there with Torp, but they did not look round or seem conscious of the presence of strangers, although Waldemar and an old man

with snow white hair left them, and the latter approaching the Nixons was immediately introduced to them by Ernst with the words, 'My father.' Being, however, unable to speak English like his son, he could only bow to Mr. Nixon, and then turn (not as it appeared unwillingly) to Georgina and Nora.

Before they parted he seemed sincerely to regret that 'business and pleasure,' as he termed it, obliged him to leave home the next day; he hoped, however, to find them at Almenau on his return, and in the mean time offered them the use of his lake, boat, and garden.

As they slowly walked back towards the village, John observed that it was a great bore not being able to speak either French or German well, adding, 'I dare say now the old fellow would have let me shoot on his grounds as well as fish in his lake, if I could have mustered German enough to have asked him properly.'

'Uncommonly civil people indeed,' said Mr. Nixon; 'they evidently wish to become acquainted with us. I suppose because we are English!'

'I rather think that Mr. Waldemar has kindly recommended us to them,' observed Nora; 'but at all events I am glad that you and Jack have found an occupation likely to amuse you for a week or two.'

## CHAPTER V.

## THE MOUNTAIN MILL.

NORA was put in possession of a cheerful little room at the forester's, and her uncle and John went regularly every day to St. Benedict's. Georgina frequently accompanied them, preferring the garden there to that of the inn, which was more the resort of beer-drinking gentlemen and coffee-drinking ladies than she approved.

'It seems,'—she observed one day to Nora, when preparing to follow her father to the lake,—'it seems to me as if the whole neighbourhood had chosen the place as rendezvous.'

'Not at all improbable,' said Nora.

'But surely, Nora, you do not approve of your Germans being so constantly lounging about the inns, as seems the custom here?'

'That entirely depends upon the circumstances in which *my* Germans live.'

'I can tell you from personal observation, for I have watched them, that there are some—many, in fact—who come here regularly every day. I begin to know their faces!'

'Well?' said Nora.

'The young men amuse themselves rolling those

horrid wooden balls that make a noise like distant thunder—quite irritating to one's nerves, the more elderly are occasionally accompanied by wives and shoals of children, but they also frequently come alone, and may be seen day after day smoking and drinking coffee while reading a small newspaper that seems to contain nothing but advertisements.'

'These people,' said Nora, 'are probably men who have situations in the offices of the neighbouring town; the distance to this village is about an hour's walk, and as such perhaps they use it daily for exercise and recreation.'

'But,' continued Georgina, 'some who come in the afternoon remain until quite late at night. Even after you have gone to your room at the forester's, and I have dismissed Nesbitt, they may be seen, sitting in the garden, smoking, talking, and singing by candlelight!'

'This,' said Nora, 'is a southern German custom that I cannot take upon me to defend.'

Georgina was silent for a few moments, and then observed hesitatingly, 'The custom does not appear to be altogether confined to the *employés* of the neighbouring town. M. Waldemar, and even the Englishman Torp, are sometimes among the company, which is of a very mixed description. I cannot tell you how surprised I was to see that gentleman-like Austrian officer, Captain Falkner, from St. Benedict's, here also.'

Nora was not at all surprised, and merely suggested that he might perhaps find it dull at home without his family.

‘Oh, I perceive you have turned completely German again,’ said Georgina; ‘but you manage to keep John very nicely from these beer-drinking parties.’

‘Who?—I?’

‘Yes,—you. I dare say Mr. Torp’s disagreeable manner to him was at first the cause of his ceasing to frequent the garden, but now we see him regularly every day either go with you, or follow you to the forester’s directly after luncheon.’

‘When he goes with me,’ said Nora, ‘it is to take a walk, but I am much more frequently obliged to engage Rosel as guide and companion, and naturally supposed that when he did not call for me, he was fishing at St. Benedict’s.’

‘He will never learn to fish,’ said Georgina, ‘and does nothing but mutter and grumble, and destroy Captain Falkner’s tackle whenever he is with us. Papa, however, is very successful, and yesterday caught quite a large trout at the bridge near the brewery. Captain Falkner was with him, and was so polite and good-natured, that we took quite a fancy to him.’

Nora, who had at first turned to Georgina, and listened with marked attention, seemed wonderfully little interested either about the fish, or Cap-

tain Falkner, so that even when her cousin added, 'He remained with us afterwards during the afternoon, and chatted very pleasantly,' she scarcely appeared to hear her, and proved her inattention by asking abruptly,

'Has Jack been talking of chamois hunting lately?'

'Not so much as at first,' answered Georgina; 'it is provoking that the forester takes care of, and rents the game on the lands of St. Benedict's, so that Captain Falkner has no longer a right to give permission to shoot on them. He mentioned having used all his influence lately in favour of M. Waldemar's friend, or something to that purport; so you see, dear Nora, this tiresome Torp is again in our way.'

'Tiresome!' exclaimed Nora, 'he is perfectly detestable. The most complete egotist I ever met. That good-natured M. Waldemar and the forester would, I know, have made no difficulties about allowing Jack to go out with them occasionally, if this odious man had not objected. I heard what he said myself, and as there is no chance of his giving way for some time, there is every probability that Jack will end, by making the acquaintance, and hunting with a young man here who is a noted wildschnetz! Do you not remember his threatening to do so the very day after we came here?'

No. Georgina had no recollection of anything



of the kind, nor the remotest idea of the danger to which her brother might be exposed, should he put his threat into execution. Nora did not think it necessary to alarm her, but resolved to endeavour to keep John out of temptation, by communicating her apprehensions to the forester's daughter Rosel, and inducing her to speak to Seppel. She therefore parted from Georgina at the turn to St. Benedict's, and, pursuing the course of the stream in a contrary direction, was soon again close to the village, somewhat beyond the last houses of which the forester's was conspicuous, from its dazzling white walls, bright green jalousies, and the gigantic antlers of a stag that decorated the gable beneath which the entrance was placed. It was separated from the road by a trim garden, with a rustic paling, and also by the stream, which here began to give unmistakeable tokens of its mountain origin, by brawling over large stones, and working its way beneath rocks protruding from the banks, effectually undermining the roots of the few old trees that still remained in its immediate vicinity.

Nora entered the ever open door, and in order to put her plan at once into execution, requested Rosel to accompany her to the Crag, informing her immediately after they left the house why she wished to go there, and making no attempt to conceal her anxiety about her cousin.

Every trace of colour forsook Rosel's face as

she listened. She remembered having seen the young Englishman pass their house frequently; she had observed Seppel standing with him near the inn on Sunday morning; and recollected, with dismay, her lover's unqualified praise of young Herr Nix, whom he had declared to be 'a lad of spirit,—up to anything,—afraid of nobody, and the making of a good soldier!' Yet a natural inclination to defend Seppel from suspicion, even in the mind of Nora, made her refrain from giving utterance to her misgivings, and when she spoke, it was with a forced smile, and in assumed confidence.

'He promised me never to go out wild-hunting again,' she said, 'and I don't think he will. Not that he wouldn't dare, but his father has been brought round, to promise to resign the Craggs to him, and with such a prospect in view, he will not be easily tempted!'

'Don't you think, however, it would be better if you were to speak to him?' said Nora.

'Of course I'll speak to him, but it's hard to know what to say, when he tells me he is no longer a wildschnetz, and that I ought to believe him when he says so.'

'At least,' said Nora, 'you can recommend him not to venture his life, and injure his future prospects, by attempting anything of the kind now, when your father, and brother, Count Waldemar,

Mr. Torp, and Captain Falkner, may meet him any day, and at any hour.'

'That's not the way to talk to him,' answered Rosel, 'the danger is just what he likes best. I am more afraid of suspicion falling on him than anything else; there is not much chance of their either seeing, or taking him prisoner, for he knows the mountains better than any of them.'

'Remember,' said Nora, 'my cousin will be with him, who, perhaps, cannot so easily make his escape in case of danger, and they may both be fired at as armed poachers, and wounded——'

'Or killed,' said Rosel, with a shudder, 'killed by my father or brother if they do not instantly stop when called to, and deliver up their rifles on the first summons; and that, Seppel will never do, though he knows that when my eldest brother lost his life in an encounter with a wildschnetz, my father swore that in future his second call should be the whistle of a bullet, and he would henceforward hunt a wildschnetz with as little compunction as if he were a chamois or deer.'

'And your father is, probably, a good marksman?' said Nora, half-inquiringly.

'Few better,' answered Rosel.

'And is it possible, that, under such circumstances, there are men in this neighbourhood daring enough to venture out deer-stalking?'

‘ More than I like to say,’ replied Rosel, nodding her head; ‘ the danger is the last thing they take into consideration, and many are only prevented from going out by want of time, or the chance that their absence from home might excite suspicion. There is no use in trying to make our young men here look upon this hunting as a crime—only those who have served their two or three years in the army can understand the game laws, and refrain altogether from hunting.’

‘ I thought they were obliged to serve six years,’ observed Nora.

‘ So they do, nominally, but when the frequent leave of absence is reckoned, it is in the end not more than half the time. Serving in the army improves and steadies them all, more or less; and even Seppel has become quite another man since he has been in the cuirassiers.’

While speaking they had sauntered in slow ascent along the banks of the stream, which began to fall in noisy cascades, and form deep green pools among rocks, that as they advanced imperceptibly assumed larger proportions. The valley narrowed, the high road seemed to dwindle into a pathway far up on the side of the mountain, and a sudden turn brought them so near the mill, that they could see the stream splashing over the labouring wheels, which, with all the demoniacal breathless energy of machinery, ground corn in one building, while in

another the trunks of trees were sawed into boards with undeviating accuracy.

A little further back, at the base of an abruptly-rising, thickly-wooded mountain, the handsome house of the miller came into view; its balconies, as is usual in the Bavarian highlands in fine weather, draped, as it were, with feather-beds and pillows, the size and number of which, with their blue and red striped covers, being considered a sort of criterion among the peasants of the wealth and cleanliness of the inhabitants. Inflated with warm summer air, they presented a so satisfactory appearance to Rosel, that she became loud in their praise and in that of the miller's wife, who was the most active and indefatigable woman in the parish.

‘And her daughter?’ said Nora, interrogatively.

‘Madeleine is young,’ she answered, evasively; ‘and, as my father says, has now money enough to make one overlook a little want of steadiness.’

‘So then,’ said Nora, ‘she is not exactly the sort of sister-in-law you desired?’

‘My mother and I looked higher for Franz, and my father too, until the miller inherited his brother's fortune. Franz has studied and passed his examinations, and there is nothing to prevent him from becoming a forstmeister and marrying a lady.’

‘And would that be more agreeable to you than

his choosing one of the friends and companions of your youth?’

‘A good connexion,’ answered Rosel, ‘such as the daughter of a counsellor of the forest board, might have helped him on in his profession. My father often said that connexion was better than money for a man who wished to rise in the world.’

‘Must I hear this even *here*?’ murmured Nora.

‘It is true,’ continued Rosel, ‘I have gone to school with Madeleine, and known her all my life. Perhaps I know her too well. In a small village like ours one hears and sees everything that goes on in the houses of one’s neighbours.’

‘And what did you see here to displease you?’ asked Nora. ‘Madeleine seems to be a remarkably quiet and extremely pretty young woman.’

‘She is not so quiet as you suppose,’ answered Rosel, ‘and is always trying to make people love her. I saw myself the trouble she took to please Florian, until he downright asked her in marriage.’

‘You mean the painter, Florian?’

‘Yes; he was as sure of her as my brother himself could have been, but Madeleine laughed, said that nothing was further from her thoughts, and that she had only talked to him because he was less unmannerly than the other men in the village.’

‘I believe I had better not attempt her defence,’ said Nora, ‘though she is pretty enough to be pardoned a little coquetry.’

‘Florian forgave her at all events,’ said Rosel. ‘He is a kind soul, and bears no malice; but there is another who will not be put off so easily, and that is black Seppel, the Tyrolean.’

‘Black Seppel!’ repeated Nora, ‘I have heard of him somewhere.’

‘He is the miller’s man, who manages everything, and has lived with them upwards of six years. He is come of as good people as the miller’s family, and need not have served if it had not been for an accident that caused a quarrel with his father, and forced him to leave home for a while. I suspect Madeleine is not easy in her mind about him, for she has been lately teasing her father to dismiss him; and it seemed quite a relief to both when he left them to spend a month in the Valley of the Inn. They may expect his return any day now, however, and what he’ll say to the betrothal I’m sure I don’t know.’

‘Is your brother aware of all this?’ asked Nora.

‘I believe,’ she answered, ‘Madeleine tells him just what she thinks necessary, and in such a pleasant sort of way, that he only laughs and likes her all the better.’

Nora stopped before the house, which looked so clean and cheerful that she was induced to ascend the stone steps to the door. The miller’s wife peered out of her kitchen, and then came bustling towards her, leading the way to the dwelling-room

with many expressions of pleasure at so unexpected a visit. The room was large; the windows well furnished with geraniums; the clock filled the place made for it in the wall; the great green stove occupied the usual space; the benches round the room, and cross-legged table, were scoured to an unusual degree of whiteness; and in cages at an open casement two canary-birds warbled loudly, straining their little throats to drown the voice of the miller's wife as she repeated her welcome to Nora, and very unnecessarily swept the spotless table with her apron.

'What a very nice house,' said Nora, looking round her with unaffected pleasure; 'so beautifully situated! so large and airy!'

'Well, the house is one of the best built hereabouts, and ought to be, having cost money enough,' answered the miller's wife; 'and I don't deny that I could have my pride and pleasure in it if my old man wasn't always wishing for the old house back again, and talking of how happily we lived in it. Rosel knows better, and young as she is, can remember the sorrow and poverty we had to endure there, and the state it was in. I might say the fire that burnt both house and mill was the greatest piece of luck that ever happened to us, if the miller had not quite broken down from fright, and never been the same since. And he grows worse from year to year, Rosel, and takes no



interest in anything, so that but for our man, Seppel, the business could not be carried on at all.'

'I have heard of this Seppel,' said Nora, perceiving that Rosel would not speak, and that an answer of some kind was expected; 'he is your head workman, I believe?'

'He's everything,' answered the miller's wife, 'saved me and my daughter the night of the fire, and when, in the midst of the confusion, I remembered that we had not had money to pay the high insurance, and thought everything we had in the world was lost, never shall I forget his telling me that he had himself gone to the town a month before and paid it for us out of his own money. From that time he has been like a son to me, and if I had another daughter, Rosel, I'd give her to Seppel.'

'People say he would take Madeleine if she would have him,' observed Rosel.

'Well, I don't know but he would,' she answered, with a smirk indicative of satisfied motherly vanity; 'and if she wasn't promised to your brother he'd be worth thinking of, I can tell you. Perhaps,' she added, on observing Nora turn from the window and the canary-birds towards the door, 'perhaps the young lady would like to see the house; strangers often ask to look at it.'

Nora smiled a ready acquiescence, and followed her across the passage to the miller's room, when,

after admiring some jugs and mugs of china and earthenware in glass cases, the drawers beneath them were pulled out, and she was requested to inspect the Sunday and holiday suits of the old couple. Without explanation much might have escaped Nora's notice, notwithstanding all her quickness of comprehension; but the miller's wife liked talking, and had no desire whatever that the double row of buttons on her husband's coat and waistcoat should pass for ordinary workmanship, when they were good pieces of silver money coined at the mint. This peasant mode of exhibiting wealth was new to Nora, and she showed the necessary portion of respect for the buttons, but was naturally more interested in the wardrobe of the female part of the family. The high heavy fur cap of the miller's wife—a curious grenadier sort of head-dress, worn on state occasions, and too costly to become common—the silk spencers, aprons, black boddices with silver chains and pendent crown-pieces, were all admired in a most satisfactory manner; and then they went up stairs, where, with a look of subdued exultation, the door of one of the front rooms was thrown open by the miller's wife, while she observed with proud humility, 'This is our best room, a poor place for a young lady like you to look at, but peasant people such as we are have a pride in it somehow.'

'And with reason,' said Nora, as she unaffectedly

admired the handsome bedsteads and beds, with elaborately flounced pillow-cases and coverlets. As completing furniture to the room there were tables and chairs, white curtains to the windows, a chest of drawers, and a remarkably large double-doored wardrobe, which last when opened disclosed a sufficient quantity of linen to have furnished a small shop. Carefully bleached and pressed, the pieces were folded and bound round with red tape as if for sale, and with surprising accuracy the miller's wife could tell the number of ells contained in each, the winter when the flax had been spun, the spring when it had been woven, and the summer during which it had been bleached.

Nora remarked that a great number of wax tapers, gilt and decorated with foil, or brilliantly coloured, were placed in front of the shelves, and soon learned from her loquacious companion that when they disposed of their hives they generally took some wax in part payment. 'For it would look poor not to have a store of these,' she explained, 'and some we want, at all events, for the church. You may be sure, Rosel,' she added, turning to the admiring girl, 'you may be sure that our Madeleine will not enter your family empty handed. These silver spoons and my mother's necklace go with her to the Forest-house.'

This latter she now held towards Nora. It was composed of twelve rows of heavy silver chains,

fastened in front by a roccoco clasp of immense dimensions, containing some garnets, topaz, and other gems more remarkable for their colour than intrinsic value.

‘Indeed all that you see will be given to Madeleine when she marries,’ continued the miller’s wife, ‘for my old man talks of nothing now but selling the mill, and settling in some other part of the country.’

‘Oh you must not let him do that,’ cried Rosel, eagerly, ‘I could not bear even the thought of having strangers living here, where I have spent the happiest days of my life playing with Madeleine and Seppel from the Crag.’

‘Rosel,’ said Nora, looking at her watch, ‘you have just reminded me that we were on our way to Seppel and the Crag, and I perceive it is much later than I supposed.’

Rosel led the way to a steep mountain path, Nora followed, but before they again entered the wood she stopped and looked back.

‘What a lovely spot it is!’ she said to her companion, ‘I think I could live here myself with pleasure if—it were a little—less noisy.’

‘Noisy!’ repeated Rosel. ‘Surely you don’t mean the water?’

‘Not exactly, I could easily get accustomed to that.’

‘Or the canary-birds?’

‘No, I like them ; but I think the clatter of the mill, and the grating of the saw, must be intolerable when heard incessantly.’

‘That’s just what makes the mill so pleasant and cheerful,’ rejoined Rosel. ‘I love the place and everything in and about it, for it was here I played as a child, climbing over the planks at the saw-mill when they appeared like mountains to me, and running into the mill to be chased out of it by the miller or one of his men, whom we children called the dragons.’

‘You seem to like the mill better than the Forest-house.’

‘I believe I do. My father was feared by the children of the village, but the miller let us jump about him as much as we pleased, so we got the habit of coming here, and to this day I like to take my knitting and sit on the rocks beside the stream, and think of the years that are past.’

‘And perhaps,’ said Nora, merrily, ‘perhaps also of those that are to come?’

‘I cannot deny it,’ answered Rosel, moving on while her cheeks crimsoned with a blush. ‘It was here that I saw Seppel first and last, as I may say : he used to come down from the Craggs when we jodel’d where the echo is.’

As Rosel finished speaking, she placed a hand at each side of her mouth, bent her body backwards, and uttered a long, loud, clear musical

shout composed of a succession of notes that were repeated, as she had expected, by the echo; but scarcely was the last faint sound lost in the distance when an equally loud and still more joyous answering shout reached them, and then Rosel, laughing gaily, sprang forward with an ease and elasticity of step that obliged Nora to use some exertion in order not to be left behind.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE CRAGS.

THE Crags was an isolated place, and might, from its elevated situation on the side of a mountain, have been supposed an autumn alp, had not the surrounding corn-fields and well-filled orchard proved that the ground was good and the climate temperate. In fact, it was a well sheltered nook ; and though the upper fields and some extent of pasture land were bounded by the wild bare weather-beaten crags from which it derived its name, a wood of fir and pine trees flourished above them, reaching the summit of the mountain in spite of the frequent interruptions caused by colossal masses of protruding rocks, in the fissures of which not only plants but trees contrived to find sustenance, and grow in the most fantastic and unaccountable manner.

The peasant's house bore evident marks of age, and was picturesque in no common degree ; the ground-floor alone was built of stone, all else of wood, brown, and weather-stained ; the small lattice windows were glazed with round pieces of the most ordinary glass ; and so low was the balcony that a tall man standing at the door might easily have

touched it with his hand, or even plucked one of the crimson pinks that hung temptingly downwards from the half decayed boxes on the shelf above the balustrade. There were scarlet geraniums there also, and stiff balsams flowering exuberantly in broken pitchers and cracked earthenware kitchen utensils, adding more to the picturesque interest of the abode than the inhabitants could easily have imagined.

The barn, an extensive wooden building forming a continuation of the house, and under the same roof, had an entrance from the fields so constructed that by means of a short and steep ascent the loaded carts could be driven into it. The gate was now wide open, for the corn was being brought home, and seemed to have required the hands of all the household: no one was to be seen, though the sound of cheerful voices and the barking of dogs might be heard at no great distance.

Nora sat down on one of the benches before the house, taking care not to displace any of the bright yellow milk-basins ranged against the wall, and then looking round her, perceived a small house at a little distance, with closed door and window-shutters, evidently uninhabited, though on its diminutive balcony large heaps of peas were drying in their pods for winter use, and some well-grown green and yellow gourds had been placed there for ornament or to ripen their seeds.



‘That’s the house for the old couple when they resign,’ said Rosel in a whisper.

‘Which for your sake I hope they may do before long,’ answered Nora; ‘the place is charming, but the house seems very, very old, and rather neglected too. I dare say it will look quite different when you and Seppel enter into possession.’

‘A little tidier, perhaps,’ said Rosel; ‘but we could not make any great changes as long as the old people live, though a new house would not cost much, as the neighbours would help, of course, and the forest rights are as good here as on the miller’s property.’

‘You must tell me all you know about these forest rights, and foresters, some other time,’ said Nora.

‘I don’t know as much as I ought to do,’ answered Rosel, ‘for after hearing all my life of forest laws, and rights, and revenues, and regulations, I only understand what I have seen with my own eyes.’

‘Quite enough for me,’ said Nora, rising, ‘and now as these people won’t come to us we must go to them.’

‘They are taking advantage of the fine weather to bring in their first corn,’ said Rosel, apologetically. ‘Seppel will be sure to come to us as soon as the cart is loaded.’

‘We need not take him from his work,’ observed

Nora, smiling at her eagerness to excuse his absence. 'I can ask him a few questions about my cousin, or you can give him a little good advice in the corn-field as well as anywhere else.'

They found the whole family working together—father, mother, sons, and servants all equally busy, Seppel alone perhaps not completely engrossed by his occupation. That his eyes wandered round the field, and that he was the first to perceive Rosel's approach, was remarked by his mother with a laugh as she followed him, when, shouldering his pitchfork, he advanced to meet the visitors. There was much friendliness in the pump-handle handshakes that followed; but a good deal less warmth in the manner of the Crag's peasant, who continued to give directions to the servants, until Nora was close behind him, when, slowly turning round, he formally raised his battered straw hat, and held it pertinaciously in his hand until repeatedly requested by her to replace it. His figure was a good deal bent by age and hard work, his large marked features furrowed with wrinkles; but the red and brown tints of the face denoted health, and contrasted well with the long snow white hair that hung down to his shoulders: he wore black leather shorts, white stockings, shoes, and a red waistcoat with silver buttons: coat he had none, nor any of the men present, but their shirt sleeves appeared in keeping with every costume, except-

ing that of Seppel, whose blue cuirassier trousers, foraging cap, erect figure, and well-trimmed moustache made the want of coat, waistcoat, and cravat rather remarkable. The peasant's wife was a stout, elderly woman, wearing a black boddice, a red-printed calico petticoat, and a broad-brimmed man's hat of coarse black straw. Her cheerful face was lighted up with smiles, and once in possession of Rosel's hand she kept it fast, swinging her arm backwards and forwards while assuring her that she was delighted to see her, and hoping before long 'to be with her old man on a pleasant mission to the forester house.'

Nora had walked on with the old peasant, and before long had heard the history of his rheumatic pains during the winter, been made acquainted with his doubts that he would ever again be what he was, and his resolution, in consequence, to resign the Craggs to his son Seppel, reserving a reasonable maintenance for himself and his wife, and a sum of money for Anderl, which he expected would be paid out of the dowry that the forester would give his daughter.

The peasant spoke as if he took it for granted that Nora had heard of the projected marriage, and knew the plans of the family; so she nodded approval, and then said, 'Shall I tell them you will come down and talk the matter over to-morrow evening?'

‘I don’t mind if you do,’ he answered; ‘they can discourse about it among themselves, and I don’t object to your letting them know also that Anderl must have his two thousand florins down before I or my old woman turn into the off house. Anderl has been always a good and steady lad, never caused me a day’s trouble since he came into the world, and has as good a right to his share as another, and let that other be who he may!’

This was said in a very determined manner, and was succeeded by a succession of nods of the head, evidently intended to challenge opposition. Now Nora, who knew that the two thousand florins amounted to something less than two hundred pounds English, considered the sum so moderate a provision for a younger son, that she remained silent, wondering what he meant, until he continued, ‘And the money must be raised at once, by hook or by crook—for Anderl after being, as I may say, master and man here for the last three years, is not likely to turn into a day-labourer on his brother’s ground!’

‘Of course not,’ said Nora.

‘Yet it’s a common thing about here,’ said the old man, who seemed possessed with a spirit of contradiction. ‘I’ve known two or three brothers living on together, so that there wasn’t a hired servant in their house.’

‘Most creditable to the family who so lived,’ observed Nora.

‘May be so,’ he rejoined, peevishly, ‘but they never came to anything after all. Now my Anderl is ambitious, and intends to make a fortune as ostler in an inn where the custom is good.’

‘I was not aware that ostlers were so well paid as to enable them to make fortunes,’ said Nora.

‘It’s not a bad thing in a house where waggoners stop the night, and there is a regular business on the road in salt, corn, or hides. If you would mention this to the forester it would be doing a service, as he’s a sensible man, and will understand why we must have the money paid down and no put off in any way.’

Nora promised, and stopped for a moment to look at the double row of beehives ranged on shelves along the side of the house, while the peasant advanced towards a tall, strongly-built, dark-complexioned man, who with long strides was descending from the Craggs directly towards the path leading to the mill.

‘Hallo Sepp,’ was shouted by the peasant and his sons with stentorian voices, ‘stop a minute and tell us how you are, and if you have seen our people at the Kerbstein lake.’

The man turned back, not very willingly as it appeared, answered the various greetings of the family with ill-concealed impatience, and then informed them that he had been that morning at the Kerbstein lake with their relations, who were all

well, and expected a visit from long Seppel the first convenient holiday.

‘Which may be next week,’ observed Seppel, ‘and perhaps to invite them to my wedding!’

‘Oh, ho!’ cried the other, glancing quickly towards Rosel, ‘wish you joy with all my heart—it will be the first wedding in the village this year, and the sooner it takes place the better. A wedding’s as good as a church fête any day, and at yours there will be the best music and—’

‘Not so fast,’ cried old Crag, interrupting him, ‘the betrothal must come before the wedding, and we are not clear about that yet. If the forester does handsomer by his son than his daughter, why, all I have to say is—that the son will be married sooner than the daughter. No offence to you, Rosel; my old woman has of course told you that Anderl must have his portion in hand the day I turn out of this house, and all depends on *your* father now.’

‘Don’t be cast down, Rosel,’ said the peasant’s wife, consolingly, ‘leave me to manage for you and Seppel. Your brother Franz will be a forester himself in no time, I dare say, and the miller’s Madeleine is so rich that a thousand florins more or less just at first will not—’

‘Franz and Madeleine?’ repeated the Tyrolean, interrupting her, while a dark shade seemed to pass over his features and his brows contracted into a fearful frown. ‘What do you mean?’

‘That they are to be married at Michaelmas,’ she answered, ‘and we fear the forester may do more for his son than his daughter.’

‘His son will require little from him on this occasion,’ he rejoined, with flashing eyes.

‘Well, that’s just what we all said,’ observed the peasant’s wife, ‘Madeleine is so well off that it cannot be of the least importance when Franz receives what the forester may be able to give him.’

‘Set your mind at rest,’ said the Tyrolean, his deep voice trembling perceptibly, while his colourless lips were forced into a smile; ‘Michaelmas will come and pass over often enough before the miller’s Madeleine is the wife of the forester’s Franz.’

Without waiting to observe the effect produced by his words he turned to the mill path and was out of sight in a moment.

A few exclamations of astonishment from the peasant and his wife preceded Nora’s leavetaking. Rosel and Seppel, who perfectly understood the cause of the Tyrolean’s ire, merely exchanged looks of intelligence, and prepared to follow her; they loitered however considerably while fastening the rustic gate in the fence towards the wood, in order to give her time to precede them, which little manœuvre so delighted the peasant’s wife, that she showed her appreciation of their tactics by a shout of laughter, and by bawling after them a profusion

of those coarse epithets that the tone of voice in which they are uttered can make alternately terms of intense endearment or virulent abuse.

That Seppel and Rosel had much to talk about, and many hopes and fears to communicate to each other may easily be imagined. Certain it is that the distance between them and Nora lengthened as they proceeded, and that she descended the steep path and reached the mill alone. The saws worked on through the quivering wood with a harsh grating sound, the water splashed over the heavy wheels and made them labour round, creaking and clattering without intermission, and so great was the din within the corn mill, that as Nora stopped for a moment at the door, the civil requests to enter of the men at work there were perfectly unintelligible excepting as far as gestures and smiles expressed them.

It was perhaps in consequence of these noises, that she reached the miller's house before she heard the sound of the loud angry voices within, though they were accompanied by a shuffling and tramping of feet, to which was soon added a succession of half-suppressed screams, ending in a loud cry of murder. Then Nora rushed into the house, and the door of the sitting-room being open, she beheld black Seppel, with eyes rolling wildly beneath his frowning eyebrows, and features perfectly livid with rage, holding at a distance the miller's wife with



one hand, while with the other he grasped her husband's cravat and shirt-collar, pressing his knuckles on the old man's throat, and shaking him in a manner that threatened strangulation. Breathlessly, and through his fixed teeth, he muttered huskily, 'Miserable villain, did you dare to forget that you were in my power! Was it not with your consent that I set fire to your cursed old mill?'

'Ye—ye—yes,' gasped the miller, with great difficulty.

'And did you not say I should have your Madeleine as bride the day my father resigned his mill to me?'

The miller made some inarticulate sound, intended perhaps for affirmation.

'Let him go, Seppel, for the love of heaven!' cried his wife, in a voice of agony, while endeavouring in vain to place herself between them.

At that moment Nora rushed forward, and as she vainly tried to remove the rough hand, or even loosen its grasp of the neck-cloth, the miller's wife called out, 'Untie it!—untie it or he will be choked!'

With trembling hand Nora caught the long ends and drew them towards her, but the knot yielded with great difficulty, and only after repeated efforts, leaving both cravat and shirt-collar still in the hands of the enraged Seppel, who, staggering backwards a few steps, dragged the miller after him to

the bench beside the table, where with a jerk he released him, and then, as the storm of passion began to subside, gloomily watched the old man's efforts to arrange his disordered dress.

To the miller's wife, who had burst into tears the moment her terror had been allayed, and was now sobbing violently, Nora turned and whispered, 'Adieu, Frau; I can be of no further use here, and must return to the village.'

The woman looked up anxiously, followed her into the passage, and said hurriedly, 'You—you have not been here long, I believe?'

'Only a moment before you saw me.'

'Did you hear—'

'Not more than a few words,' said Nora, anxious to re-assure her.

'It will be better not to mention this quarrel at the forester's,' she began, with evident embarrassment.

'Neither there nor elsewhere,' answered Nora; 'you may depend upon me.'

She walked towards the garden, and looked up in the direction of the Crag, but instead of Rosel, perceived Madeleine tripping gaily homewards. She had gone at daybreak to her father's alp, having heard from the forester and his son that they were likely to hunt in that neighbourhood with Captain Falkner, Count Waldemar, and Mr. Torp; and after having done the honours of her

hut, by supplying them with cream, butter, and cheese, she had in requital been flattered and cajoled to her heart's content by the mirthful and hungry sportsmen. They had accompanied her down the mountain, parted from her but a few minutes before, and the flush of gratified vanity was still on her dimpled cheek as she approached her home, adroitly carrying on her head a flat basket, in which, covered with a napkin, she had put some fresh butter and a cheese for her parents.

She was still singing a snatch of one of the *Schnaderhuepfeln* with which Captain Falkner and Waldemar had beguiled the time of rest on the alp, and in clear loud tones was offering a bunch of green ribbons to some imaginary deserted lover, when her mother called out, 'Hush, Madeleine!—hush! or you'll make him as mad as ever!'

'Who?' asked Madeleine, with a careless smile, removing her basket from her head, and then curtsying in her best manner to Nora.

'Seppel. He's within,' said her mother.

'Does he know—has he heard—,' began Madeleine, and then she paused, raised her apron, and passed it across her face, which became colourless as her mother nodded despondingly, and pointed to the door of the adjacent room.

'I don't see why I should be more afraid of him than any one else,' she said, forcing an appearance of courage that her pale lips belied. 'I've chosen

Franz, and I'm not likely to change my mind for anything Seppel may say!

Impatiently shaking off her mother's detaining hand, she advanced into the room, and, in a half conciliatory, half defiant manner, held out her hand, exclaiming, 'Welcome back, Sepp; we almost thought you had forgotten us.'

He took her hand, but only to fling it from him with such violence that she reeled to the wall, and with difficulty kept herself from falling.

'Unmannerly boor!' she cried, angrily, 'the next time I offer you my hand you'll take it, or I'm much mistaken.'

'Madeleine,' said her mother, coming forward, 'I am afraid he has a right to it and yourself, any day, for the asking.'

'I should like to know who gave him such a right?' she asked, saucily.

'Your father,' answered the miller's wife, beginning to sob afresh. 'I did not know until to-day that he was bound by a promise.'

'I've made no promise,' said Madeleine, angrily interrupting her; 'and if I had I wouldn't keep it.'

'Have you not?—Would you not?' cried Seppel, fiercely, catching her arm, and drawing her towards him.

'No,' she answered, boldly; 'and I won't be made answerable for every thoughtless word I may have spoken to you when I was a child.'

‘Child!’ he repeated, in angry derision, ‘why it is but two years ago, and you were as tall as you are now, and nearly as stout, and quite as handsome, and a deal quieter and humbler; but at that time, Madeleine, you did not know that an uncle would die suddenly and make you rich; you thought that few in the village—and least of all the forester’s Franz—would think of you as a wife; and you knew—and right well too—that I was the son of the rich miller at the other side of the mountains. One thing you did *not* know,’ he added, gloomily, ‘but your father might have told you any day, that as long as he lives you can never marry any one but me.’

‘I don’t believe you!’ cried Madeleine, vehemently; ‘and if you think I’m afraid of you, you’re greatly mistaken.’

‘You’re so completely in my power,’ continued Seppel, with savage tranquillity, ‘that I can insist on our bans being published next week, and maybe I’ll do it. Your father daren’t object; for we’ve done *that* together which makes us more than friends for life.’

‘You have no proof,’ cried the miller, interrupting him, in a harsh, discordant voice; ‘no proof of any kind.’

‘Have you forgotten the letter you wrote me from Munich, telling me not to do the deed we had planned together?’ asked Seppel, malevolently.

‘It reached me twelve hours too late, but I have kept it by me carefully, and on my person, ever since. It is here—here!’ he said, tapping the breast-pocket of his jacket; ‘and though for my own sake I shall not use it, unless driven by jealousy to revenge myself, you may as well remember that I am not a man to be trifled with. Give me your daughter, as you promised, and—’

‘I won’t be given to you!’ cried Madeleine, passionately; ‘for I like Franz’s little finger better than your whole body. If you had twenty letters from my father I would not marry you!’

‘Wait till you know what the letter’s about,’ said Seppel, with a bitter smile. ‘You have worried me enough for more than three years, Madeleine, and I’m tired of this sort of life. As to your fancy for the forester’s son, it will pass away, like your love for many another that I could name. I was the first, as you’ve often told me—I intend to be the last; and the sooner you make up your mind to cross the mountains with me, the better for both perhaps.’

He strode across the room, bent his tall figure when passing through the doorway, and as he ascended the stairs to his room, Nora left the garden, to join Rosel and her companion, too much occupied with all she had heard and seen, to remember that she had intended to question and warn the latter about her cousin John. It occurred to her

after he had left them to return to the Craggs, and Rosel had honestly confessed having forgotten to mention the young Englishman to her lover; but Nora, though greatly provoked at their mutual forgetfulness, had no time to repair it, as she was obliged to hurry on to the village to dine with her relations.

Mr. Nixon was in high spirits: he had caught a trout of considerable size, and had invited Captain Falkner to dine with him and partake of it. Fish and fishing was the chief topic of conversation, which in no way interested Nora, excepting inasmuch as she observed John's indifference on the subject. When questioned by her after dinner, he said he had no patience for fishing, preferred making excursions on the mountains, and had been that day at Saint Hubert's chapel, and in Tyrol, where, at a shabby little inn on the frontiers, he had drunk some capital wine, and made the acquaintance of a miller returning to Almenau.

'Black Seppel?' suggested Nora.

'I don't know his name,' answered John; 'he is head man at the new mill outside the village here, and had been to see his father, who is very old and infirm. He often crosses the mountains for that purpose, and appeared known to all the people we met—indeed he seemed quite at home at most of the peasants' houses, especially on the Tyrolean side.'

‘That was black Seppel, I am sure,’ said Nora.

‘Very likely,’ replied John; ‘half the men about here are called Seppel, or Sepp, which I believe means Joseph. You have only to call a fellow Sepp on chance, and nine times out of ten you will be right.’

‘I saw this man at the Craggs to-day,’ observed Nora, ‘and took no fancy to him whatever.’

‘Nor I either,’ said John; ‘so we parted company soon after passing the frontiers, and I returned to the village by St. Benedict’s. By-the-by, Nora, *that* Torp and the others had famous sport this morning; they were out at daybreak, and, I hear, shot black cock and a gigantic bird called *Auerhahn*. Georgy *might* say something for me to Captain Falkner; she sees him every day, and I suspect he fishes with the governor that he may talk to her; but when I asked her to give him another hint about me, she declared she could not possibly do so, it would have such an odd appearance.’

Nora smiled. ‘Have patience, Jack, and you will find that Mr. Torp will tire of the village and its inhabitants before long; another week’s shooting will probably satisfy him, for the forester told me he had already begun to talk of going to Herrenburg in Tyrol.’

‘Where the Falkners are?’ asked John.

‘Yes; and when he is gone the forester and his



son will do whatever I ask them. In the mean time you must be satisfied with exploring the mountains about here; and I think you had better not ask long Seppel to go with you as guide, for his father wants him at the Crags, where they have a great deal of field-work to do just now.'

'Oh, I know that,' he said, impatiently. 'I was up there yesterday for two or three hours.'

'Jack,' said Nora, reproachfully, 'you went there to borrow a gun, and ask him to go out with you; I'm sure you did.'

John did not attempt denial, and she continued, 'If no fears of the consequences, as far as you are yourself concerned, can deter you, have at least some consideration for this young man, whose prospects would be completely ruined if he engaged in any exploit of the kind just now.'

'Do not be uneasy, my dear Norry,' said John, evidently wishing to end the conversation. 'Your young man has, as you observed just now, no time, and, it appears, but little inclination, to do anything but wield a reaping-hook at present. I never was so disappointed in any fellow as in this long Seppel.'

'I am glad to hear it,' answered Nora. 'It seems that Rosel was right when she supposed a few years' service in the army had quieted him.'

## CHAPTER VII.

## WAYS AND MEANS.

NORA returned to the forester's house at an unusually early hour the next evening, having been requested by Rosel to act as mediatrix, if necessary, between her father and the Crag peasant, should any difference arise in their proposed arrangements. She found both families assembled in the little parlour, well supplied with beer, bread, and tobacco, Rosel seated somewhat apart, apparently occupied with her spinning-wheel, but looking very anxious and flushed.

Nora's arrival as inmate of the house caused neither surprise nor embarrassment; they all knew her, some had even learned to pronounce her name from the servants at the inn, and greeted her as 'Mees Nora,' and Franz and Seppel stumbled against each other in their eagerness to hand her a chair; but after she had drawn from her pocket a piece of crochet-work and bent over it, they immediately resumed their places and the conversation as if no interruption had occurred.

The Crag peasant had a packet of yellow-looking papers in an old leather case before him, and

Franz, apparently acting as secretary, sat, pen in hand, prepared to draw up any agreement into which they might enter.

‘It was in the year twenty,’ said the peasant, adjusting his spectacles on the end of his nose, ‘in the year twenty that I entered into possession of the Craggs, and, according to contract, agreed to give my parents yearly as follows.’ He opened one of the papers and read slowly—

1 bushel of wheat,  
 2 ditto rye,  
 1 peck of barley,  
 18 lbs. of butter,  
 100 eggs,  
 25 lbs of meat,  
 6 lbs. of linseed oil,  
 12 lbs of flax,

‘One quarter of the orchard fruit; cabbage, potatoes, and turnips as required; a quart of milk daily; wood for fuel, and the necessary repairs of the off house; a pair of shoes and a pair of slippers annually; and twenty florins a-year, paid quarterly.’

‘That’s all fair,’ observed the forester, with a nod of approbation. ‘The ground about the Craggs is good, and there is no mortgage on it, I believe?’

‘No mortgage,’ repeated the peasant, ‘and there-

fore I expect you will make no difficulty about the provision for Anderl. The young lady there has, perhaps, told you that I expect two thousand florins for him.'

'You must be satisfied with half the sum,' said the forester, decidedly, 'or—we shall never come to terms. I am not a rich man, but my daughter will not go ill provided into your house. Besides her bed and her spinning-wheel, her clothes and house-linen, she shall have one thousand florins on the day of her marriage, and perhaps the same sum after my death; but more than this I cannot give her.'

'Then, neighbour,' said the peasant, doggedly, 'there is no use in talking longer about this matter, unless you choose Seppel to raise the money on mortgage, which, however, *I* cannot take upon me to recommend.'

'No,' cried the forester, pushing his chair backwards, 'no; I know too well that such a beginning would lead to ruin. I cannot allow my daughter, and you cannot advise your son, to commence housekeeping with a debt they may never be able to pay off.'

'I don't advise,' said the old man, with a peculiarly artful smile; 'I said if you chose. It all rests with you. Seppel, in his wish to possess the Crag and marry Rosel, is ready to agree to any-

thing, though I have counted over and over the income and expenditure, and proved to him that a few florins at the end of the year is all he can expect to put aside, and may be thankful, when he has a family, if he can keep clear of debt. Oh no! I don't advise! I leave everything to you!

'Come, come, Craggs,' said the forester, smiling, 'we all know your love of contradiction, but this is going too far. People say you have managed to save money, and I suppose your son can do the same.'

'My savings are said to be more considerable than they really are,' observed the peasant. 'After thirty years' management of the Craggs, I have, it is true, contrived to scrape together a few hundred florins, but it is only since my sons could help in the work, and corn and cattle have risen in price. The house is now in want of repair.'

'Well,' said the forester, 'there is no denying you might have kept it in better order.'

'What for?' asked the peasant. 'May be that it might look handsomer when seen from the off house after I had resigned. No, no, forester, you don't know me yet!'

'I believe that's true,' said Franz, who had latterly been biting the end of his pen, as he sat with his eyes fixed on the peasant. 'My father is up-

right and honest, and speaks his mind, but the devil himself could hardly make out what you're at now. Perhaps you're not willing to resign. If that's it, say so; there's nobody has a right to compel you.'

'I'm willing enough to resign,' he answered, slowly. 'After labouring ten years for my father and thirty for myself, I've had enough. And what with the rheumatism and my goitre, and the wish of my old woman to see her Seppel married, I'm at times more than willing; but knowing the income and expenditure, I can't advise the burdening of the land with a debt, and see no way for the young people but your coming forward with the money.'

'I can't give what I haven't got,' began the forester, angrily; but an appealing look from the two women opposite him, and a glance at Rosel's dismayed face, seemed to appease him. 'Let us go a little more into detail,' he added, quietly, 'and see how matters stand. Perhaps you have got your last year's account, and from it we can make an estimate.'

Seppel came forward noiselessly, and added one to the eager faces around the table, as the peasant drew from his pocket a large sheet of paper covered with sprawling writing and figures, and, as if he had been prepared for the request, read without com-

ment an account of his outlay and income during the preceding year, which, being drawn up in a rather confused style, was listened to with but the more intense attention by all his auditors.

When he had ended, no one seemed inclined to speak, and as he laid the paper on the table, and took off his spectacles, he observed composedly, 'After deducting the taxes and parish rates from the overplus, the remainder, I take it, will prove somewhat less than was expected!'

Old Craggs rubbed his chin and mouth very diligently for a few seconds, Nora almost thought to hide a smile of satisfaction at the dismay he had caused, and then began to fold up his papers, and replace them in the leather case.

'The value of your property has been greatly overrated,' said the forester.

'That's not my fault,' answered the peasant, 'the truth might have been known any day for the asking. I thought you had lived long enough in the mountains to know that the soil so high up is not always of the best description.'

'I know you grow wheat every year,' rejoined the forester.

'Well, I don't deny that worse land might be found in the parish than at the Craggs,' said the peasant; 'I don't complain. If I'm not rich, I can at least say that no one ever felt want in my

house. There's always enough to eat, and something to spare for a stray guest; my servants are paid regularly, and get their shoes, jackets, linen, and harvest-money at the time appointed. We don't work on holidays at the Craggs, and keep our church festival in a becoming manner, and I have always been a contented man, and so was my father before me, and his father before him, and Seppel can live as we have done, and is willing if you'll consent to raise the second thousand on the land. I dare say you'll pay the interest during your life time, and in your will make all straight again.'

'No,' said the forester, rising, 'I cannot consent to this arrangement. You seem to forget that I have two children, and whether or not I may live to save another thousand florins, God only knows. My eldest son fell by the hand of a wildschuetz, and such may be my fate any day in the year—there are enough of them in our neighbourhood'—here he glanced for a moment towards Seppel, and amended his speech, by adding,—'from Tyrol I mean—and I shall never rest until I have hunted them all down. Now with regard to this money, you see I can do nothing, and promise nothing. My daughter has not been daintily brought up; she is willing and able to work, and can live at the Craggs as others have done. It is hard enough



that her fortune is taken from her before she enters into possession, as I may say, and given to Anderl ; but as to her commencing with a loan, and having to pay interest for it, perhaps as long as she lives, that is out of the question, and there is nothing more to be said if *you* will not do something handsome for them.'

' I can neither do nor say anything more,' observed the peasant, closing his leather case, and dropping it into one of the pockets of a grass green coat, that seemed to have been inherited from his father or grandfather, the waist being formed by two large buttons placed almost between his shoulders, the remainder of the garment sweeping the floor at each side of his chair, when seated, and hanging down to his heels when he stood up. ' I have two children, as well as you, forester,' he added, ' and I do not see why one should get all, and the other next to nothing.'

' But the "all" is not much,' interposed the forester's wife, ' Seppel and Rosel will have enough to live upon, and no more. A thousand florins with what you will give him from your savings, and a home at the Craggs, when he chooses to stay there, is surely enough for Anderl.'

' Do you suppose,' said the peasant, angrily, ' that my Anderl is likely to be a day-labourer at the Craggs, or to turn wood-cleaver, or charcoal-

burner on the mountains here under your husband? We have other plans for him, as the young lady there might have told you, and he shall not come short, let what will happen, for it is only lately that my wife has made me give up my intention of resigning to Anderl instead of Seppel.'

'Ah—ah!' cried the forester, with a look of intelligence, 'is that your drift?—then indeed there is no chance of our coming to terms. Rosel,' he said, turning to his daughter, 'you see that no ill-will on my part against Seppel stands between you and your happiness. You know that I cannot do more than I offered just now, and after hearing that the income at the Crag, even in good years, so very little exceeds the expenditure, you must be convinced that I am right in refusing my consent to the proposed mortgage.'

'Of course, father—of course you know best,' faltered Rosel, 'but—but I cannot give up Seppel!' One hand wiped the tears from her eyes, the other she extended frankly to her lover.

Nora, who had followed attentively the calculations of the peasant, and listened to the discussion that had preceded and followed it with the deepest interest, now rose, and laying her hand gently on Rosel's shoulder said, 'I can be of use here, or rather we can be of use to each other, Rosel. You

know,' she added, turning to the forester, 'that I have come to Almenau to erect a tombstone on the grave of a very near relation in the churchyard here. I want some one to take charge of this grave, to plant flowers on it in summer, and decorate it with wreaths during the winter, and consider a thousand florins by no means too much for this purpose. Rosel shall receive the money from me any day you appoint, on condition that Seppel promises for himself, and imposes as a duty on all future possessors of the Crag, to attend to this grave in the manner I have described.'

Great was the surprise and delight caused by this speech, the old Crag peasant alone appearing more astonished than pleased. Rosel seized Nora's hand, and stared at her in speechless happiness; the forester bowed repeatedly, and said the proposal was munificent, the engagement should be contracted formally, and an agreement concerning the grave drawn up, signed, sealed, and delivered into her hands; Seppel standing before her erect, as if about to present arms, first thanked, and then assured her she had not misplaced her generosity, and that no grave in the parish should be better attended to than that of her relation.

The forester's wife and Seppel's mother were loud in their expressions of gratitude, but no entreaties could prevail on the Crag peasant to

resume his seat, in order to drink another glass of beer, and wish the young people a speedy and merry wedding.

‘Time enough—time enough,’ he said testily, drawing a black silk night-cap over his head, and taking up his hat, ‘time enough when the day of betrothal comes.’

‘But,’ said the forester, ‘I hope you’ll go to the town, and ask the judge to name a day next week for the drawing up of the surrender and marriage contract; and when all is in order, we’ll have a little merry-making here, and I dare say Mees Nora won’t disdain to join us, or Count Waldemar either.’

‘I’m not going into the town till Wednesday,’ said the peasant, peevishly.

‘Well, Wednesday is not long off,’ observed the forester, good humouredly, ‘we’re not going to be unreasonable; and if Seppel sows the winter corn on his own account this year at the Craggs it’s all we want, or expect.’

Nora had found an opportunity of leaving the room unperceived, and it was evident that the peasant had been put into a more congenial humour afterwards, for as he passed beneath the balcony on which she was standing, when he left the house, she heard him talking and laughing as gaily as the forester and his family, who all ac-

accompanied him as he turned into the pathway leading to the Crags.

While Nora looked after the noisy happy party, her mind was so occupied with kind sympathy, and generous plans for future benefits to be conferred on Rosel, that she was unconscious of the approach of Waldemar and Torp, who, having fished with tolerable success in the trout streams near the village, now turned to the forester's house, to inquire about their chance of sport the ensuing day, should they go out deer-stalking.

Waldemar loitered and looked round him, Torp strode quickly forward, for, like most Englishmen, he made a business even of pleasure, and with the most unceasing perseverance fished and hunted alternately, pursuing his sports with an intentness and eagerness that not unfrequently made him overlook the beauties of the country about him, or caused him to consider many of them as mere impediments, which, when overcome, would serve to enhance in his own and others' eyes the triumph of success.

While Waldemar, with head uncovered and upturned smiling face, addressed Nora, and induced her to lean over the balcony to answer him, Torp, scarcely glancing toward her, merely touched his hat, and stalked into the house. He was still employed questioning the stupid old woman, who

was rinsing beer glasses in the kitchen, as to the time when the forester was expected home, when he heard his friend enter the adjacent passage and bound up the stairs three or four steps at a time. It was in vain he cleared his throat, coughed significantly, and finally called to him. Waldemar either did not or would not hear, and Torp, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, entered the little sitting-room, and naturally turned to the gun-rack as the object most likely to interest him while awaiting the return of the forester or his son. In order to gain a nearer view of the rifles and fowling-pieces, he pushed aside with his foot a spinning-wheel, and on the floor where it had stood perceived a small patent pocket-book, firmly closed with patent pencil. He picked it up, examined it for a moment, and though there was no name or initial on the green morocco cover—no engraving on the pale amethyst that decorated the top of the pencil—he knew that it could only belong to Nora Nixon, and therefore pitched it carelessly on the nearest window-stool. This would not be worth recording, had he not afterwards occasionally interrupted his inspection of the fire-arms in order to glance towards the neat little book, and ended by once more taking it up, and then deliberately walking out of the room.

Restoring it to its owner would, he thought.

serve to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* that had already lasted long enough ; yet he hesitated, and hardly knew how to put his plan in execution, when, on reaching the lobby, he caught a glimpse of Waldemar through the door that opened on the balcony. He was sitting on a wooden bench with Nora, bending forwards, and explaining the last drawings he had made in his sketch-book, which was spread open between them. The noise of the stream before the house prevented Torp from hearing what Waldemar said, when, pointing to some spot on the paper, he observed, 'It was somewhere here that Torp shot the black cock yesterday morning, and with a rifle too ! He is a capital shot with a bullet, and hunts with a patience and perseverance that is at times quite incomprehensible to me. I like deer-stalking as well as most sportsmen, and will climb, and creep, and crawl as long as any one ; but to stand for hours waiting for a shot, either in the twilight or moonlight, is a thing I can't endure, so I generally leave him with the forester or Franz, and take refuge in the nearest hut. We were last night on this alp, the highest about here ; in fact, it can only be used in the heat of summer, and the cattle are to leave it in a day or two ; but the view from it is magnificent, and will well repay you for the trouble of mounting.'

'Do you think I could undertake such a walk ?'

asked Nora. 'Your drawing gives me the idea of a very wild place.'

'It is a wild place, and is called the Wild Alp,' answered Waldemar; 'but I have taken it into my head that you can not only walk but also climb well, and that difficulties would not easily discourage you.'

Nora smiled.

'We have had such remarkably fine weather lately,' he continued, 'that I may safely recommend you to undertake the excursion; one day's rain, however, would make part of the way impracticable for a lady, on account of the cows' stockings.'

'Cows' stockings?' repeated Nora, interrogatively.

'I mean holes in the swampy ground which have been made by the passage of cattle in wet weather, when they follow each other in single file, stepping regularly into these holes, then filled with water, and carefully avoiding the more solid mud around them. After a succession of footbaths of this description, you may imagine the appearance of the cows.'

'I can,' said Nora, interrupting him with a laugh, 'and understand your hint so well that I shall certainly choose dry weather for an expedition to the Wild Alp.'

'Why not make it to-morrow,' rejoined Waldemar, eagerly, 'and let me accompany you?'



‘If I could persuade Jack,’ began Nora.

‘Oh, never mind him!’ cried Waldemar. ‘Take Rosel with you, who can make herself useful, and carry a basket of provisions. You don’t mind getting up at daybreak, I hope?’

‘Not at all, and you tempt me so strongly that I really must endeavour to make arrangements, with both Jack and Rosel, to start at four o’clock to-morrow morning. I suppose that is early enough?’

‘If Monsieur Jaques go with you,’ said Waldemar, ‘you might as well make a two days’ tour, and go on to the Kerbstein lake.’ He placed a sketch before her, in which high mountains enclosed an apparently more deep than extensive sheet of water; towards the foreground some remarkably jagged rock impeded a stream that flowed from it, forming long low cascades; and in a sheltered nook, the probable opening into a narrow valley, stood a solitary *châlet* built half of stone and half of wood, fishing-nets pending from the balcony, and a couple of roughly made boats so near that Nora scarcely required the explanation given when he added, ‘That’s the Kerbstein fisherman’s house, where you could remain the night; Torp has already spent a day there, and says the people are uncommonly civil; by-the-by, he might go with us—or meet us at the lake—or something?’

‘No, thank you,’ said Torp, who had reached the door to the balcony a couple of minutes previously, and now stood leaning against it. ‘You seem to have quite forgotten that if we do not hunt to-morrow you proposed going to Saint Hubert’s chapel, and afterwards across the mountains into Tyrol. I know you are expected at Herrenburg.’

These last words were uttered with much meaning, and seemed to cause some annoyance to Waldemar.

‘I have fixed no time for my return home, Torp,’ he answered, a little impatiently, ‘and having been accepted as guide to the Wild Alp by Mees Nora, you must excuse my leaving you either to hunt with Franz, or inspect the ancient altar at Saint Hubert’s without me.’

‘I cannot allow you to break an engagement on my account,’ said Nora, ‘for if I want a guide one can easily be found in the village. In fact, the painter Florian has already offered his services through our landlady, and I ought to have gone to see him and his mother long ago, as it was at their relation’s house I was so hospitably received at Ammergau.’ She spoke without looking at Torp, for she was vexed that, having heard her ready acceptance of Waldemar’s offer, he had not also been made aware of her intention to decline his being invited to join their party: she felt, too, some

natural irritation at his thinking it necessary to defend his friend from the imaginary danger of her society, and not a little increase of indignation at his interference on all occasions.

‘Am I to understand that you have changed your mind, and will not accept my escort?’ asked Waldemar, rising.

‘Precisely,’ answered Nora. ‘I shall defer my excursion to the Wild Alp until next week, and spend to-morrow in the village. That old castle on the hill deserves a visit, and when there I can amuse myself rebuilding the edifice in imagination — it will not be difficult, as they say it was inhabited towards the end of the last century.’

‘So!’ cried Waldemar gaily. ‘So you build castles in the air occasionally?’

‘Rather say continually,’ replied Nora, laughing; ‘for since I entered the Bavarian highlands every hill has been supplied with a castle, and every dale with a cottage!’

‘And have you peopled your castles and cottages?’ asked Waldemar.

‘N—o,’ answered Nora, and a sudden melan-

choly overspread her features, for the light question had brought strongly to her recollection her depressingly isolated position. Of the few near relations left her, was there one she could ask to live in a German cot or castle with her? Her uncle's treasure was in London, and with it his heart; Georgina would call such a residence being buried alive; Jack was a mere boy, full of youthful frolic, with a decided inclination to enjoy the world and its pleasures to the utmost; his brother Samuel she scarcely knew, and friends she had none! Yes—one—Irene Schaumberg; but what changes might not a ten years' separation have produced in her regard! These thoughts had but flashed through her mind, however, when Waldemar, surprised by her seriousness, said, with a mixture of curiosity and interest,

‘Not peopled! not swarming with English friends and relations!’

Nora shook her head.

‘So much the better,’ he said, reseating himself on the wooden bench beside her, and nodding a laughing defiance to Torp,—‘so much the better; there will be the more room for Bavarians and Tyroleans! You really must allow me, Mees

Nora, to accompany you to this ruin to-morrow ; I know something of architecture, and we can build and plan together in the most satisfactory manner imaginable. Now don't refuse, or I shall think it time to be offended.'

'I cannot well refuse,' answered Nora, smiling, 'seeing that the ruins of Waltenburg are quite as much at your service as mine.'

'And you will permit me to go there with you, or,'—he added, correcting himself,—'to be there at the same time that you are?'

'Of course,' said Nora, as she rose from her lowly seat. 'Until the castle is mine, I cannot raise the drawbridge, and refuse you entrance.' When passing Torp, who stood in the doorway, she perceived her pocket-book in his hand.

'This is yours,' he said, coldly handing it to her ; 'I found it on the floor in the room below stairs.'

'It is mine—thank you,' said Nora, and a so unwonted colour spread over her face as she received it, that Waldemar's attention was instantly attracted.

'I wish,' he said, 'that I had found your book ; it evidently contains secrets, and you fear that Torp,

in looking for the owner's name inside, may have discovered—'

'I have no fears of the kind,' said Nora, interrupting him. 'Nothing, I am sure, would have induced Mr. Torp to open this book or read a line of its contents. If he had not known it to be mine, he would have left it in the parlour.'

Torp seemed to consider even a word of assurance unnecessary.

'You do not deny that there are secrets in it, Mees Nora,' persisted Waldemar, 'and I would give much to possess it. See, here are my sketches of Ammergau; you have more than once said you wished to possess them. Let us make an exchange—they are yours for the note book!'

Nora thought over the contents of her little green book, and then dropped it into her pocket. Secrets such as Waldemar perhaps expected to find in it there were none. She had got the habit, during her solitary hours in Russell-square, of taking notes when reading, of writing lists of books, short critiques of those just read, and other matters of an equally unimportant description. A box full of such small volumes had been left in Mrs. Duckers's care in England, and any of them,

or many of them, she would, without hesitation, have given for the tempting sketches now offered her ; but the little green book in question unfortunately contained in its side pocket the letter that Charles Thorpe had written to her uncle ten years previously, and a few memoranda, which, if shown to Torp by Waldemar, would inevitably lead to explanations that she by no means desired.

‘I am sorry I cannot make the exchange you propose,’ she said, turning away ; ‘I wish these sketches had some other price.’

‘Stay,’ cried Waldemar, springing after her to the head of the staircase, ‘listen to me, Mees Nora—the sketches *have* another price ; they shall be yours for—for—a cup of coffee made by you yourself for *me*—any day you please on any of the alps about here.’

‘A cup of coffee!’ repeated Nora, incredulously, ‘You shall have a dozen, if you desire it.’

‘I shall remind you of this agreement,’ said Waldemar.

‘You need not,’ she answered, laughing, ‘I shall take care not to let you forget it.’

Waldemar could scarcely wait until she was out

of hearing before he exclaimed, 'You see, Torp, I shall win the wager.'

'Perhaps you may,' he answered, dryly; 'that you will make a fool of yourself, is, however, even more certain, and I greatly fear that your father will think that I led you into temptation.'

'Pshaw!' cried Waldemar, impatiently. 'I acknowledge that I am considerably *épris* with this black-eyed nymph of the Thames; but I could go to Herrenburg to-morrow, and in a week—or—let us say a fortnight, I could forget her—yes, I think I could forget her in a fortnight or three weeks.'

'Then go,' said Torp, earnestly, 'go while the effort is easily made, and you will spare yourself and your family a world of annoyance. I have made the inquiries about these Nixons that you desired, and heard to-day, from a friend of mine who knows everybody in London, that this man has undoubtedly a large fortune, but also a large family; there are sons in Australia and elsewhere, one a lawyer in London, and the interesting youth now here, called Jack. The eldest daughter is well known in town from being constantly with the Savage Waywards, the younger my friend cannot



well remember, he believes she has resided chiefly in the country; some people supposed her consumptive, others said she was eccentric, and many now assert she is dead. We know that she is neither dead nor consumptive, but I think the word eccentric may be used when describing her. At all events, according to the letter, the young ladies may 'be worth' about twenty thousand pounds a-piece!

'It is the connexion and not the fortune I wanted to hear about,' said Waldemar, with a look of annoyance.

'My informant,' continued Torp, 'could not give me much more information on that subject than I gave you at Ammergau. The founder of the family, according to the legend, was a peasant boy, who wandered to London in the Whittington fashion, and afterwards made a fortune in trade. This is an old story, and a convenient one for finding arms when they become necessary; whether true or not is of little importance, for though love might manage to blind you, your father would certainly put on his spectacles when examining the genealogy of the Nixons, and nothing but the most enormous fortune would induce him to over-

look its defects. Perhaps, after saying so much, I ought to add, that one of this family married a relation of ours many years ago.'

'Ah!' said Waldemar, 'such marriages cause no commotion in an English family!'

'The lady was a widow, and perfectly at liberty,' answered Torp; 'so though my father greatly disapproved, and indeed opposed the marriage, which turned out even worse than he expected, he could not prevent it. I have spoken to little purpose, Waldemar, if it has not yet become evident to you that one of this family is no match for a Bendorff of Herrenburg, who has every chance of succeeding to a principality and becoming a Serene Highness in the course of time.'

'That's it,' cried Waldemar, 'that chance is what makes my father so hard to please. I hope your succession to an English earldom has served to hamper you in the same way.'

'I have not thought much about the matter as far as concerns myself,' answered Torp, 'but my brother gave me much trouble about ten years ago, when I was obliged strenuously to oppose his making a disagreeable match of this kind. Oddly enough,' he added, 'it was one of these Nixons, the daughter

of that relative of ours of whom I spoke just now, that he took it into his head to marry. The very name of this family is odious to me ever since, for though Medway yielded to my remonstrances in the end, we quarrelled a whole year about the matter. Do not expect me, however, to make the same efforts for you, Waldemar; but I am ready and willing to leave Almenau to-morrow, and share your flight from this nymph of the Thames as you call her.'

'No, Torp, I ask no such sacrifice. You are right; I shall order horses for to-morrow morning, and leave without again seeing Mees Nora. In four-and-twenty hours, my friend, I shall be at Herrenburg, admiring the magnificent dress of Irene, Countess Schaumberg, and making grave inquiries about the education of my unruly little ward Adelheid.'

'That's right!' said Torp, 'I should not have thought a retreat so necessary if I had not seen plainly to-day what has happened to Falkner.'

'There is no doubt how that affair will end,' said Waldemar, laughing; 'Ernst evidently hopes to persuade the other nymph to follow him into

Hungary, and if he succeed, she will not be the first Englishwoman who has married into *our* regiment as we call it, from having so many relations among the officers. My brother tells me that two of his best friends have English wives, patterns of perfection by all accounts, women who stop at home and all that sort of thing; and I suspect it is the recollection of them that has made Falkner think of Mees Nixie. She is not ill-looking, however, far from it, but not to be compared to Nora—my Nora—our Nora! I wonder he did not choose Nora!

‘I wish he had,’ said Torp, ‘or rather I wish the whole family and their projected tombstone were in some other Bavarian village. After I have hunted on the Wild Alp you may expect me at Herrenburg, as I shall of course miss you greatly and find it dull here without you. But go you must, Waldemar, and without delay, for I see plainly that this girl is just the sort of person likely to make you more desperately in love than you have ever yet been, and that is saying a good deal.’

‘Ah ha! Then you admit that she is charming?’

‘She is dangerous,’ said Torp, ‘and—a—you will go to the Valley of the Inn to-morrow, old fellow, won’t you?’

‘I will,’ answered Waldemar, heroically.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A RUSTIC STUDIO.

NORA was in the village at so early an hour the next morning that most of the inhabitants were at church, for it is there the Highland peasant commences both work and holiday, invoking a blessing alike on toil and pleasure. The sound of the well-played organ induced her to follow some dilatory labourers into the handsome edifice, which, with its showily decorated altar, was the pride of the parish. She saw her companions doff their battered straw hats, stroke down their hair on their forehead, and reverently kneel down, while bright beams of earliest sunshine, finding an entrance through the high narrow windows, passed over their rugged features, and directed her glance to other groups of men and women who, in remote corners or at side altars, forgetful of the presence of those around them, gave an outward expression to their devotion, both in feature and posture, which is said to be a pecu-

liarity of southern nations, but seems common to all votaries of the Roman Catholic religion.

The service was soon over, the congregation, not having time to linger in or about the churchyard as on Sundays, dispersed at once, and Nora turned towards the not far distant house of Florian and his mother. It had a rather smarter air than the dwellings around it, had light green jalousies, and no trees in front, perhaps to prevent the passers-by from overlooking the shop-window at the left side of the entrance, which displayed a collection of heterogeneous articles, such as pipes, coarse cutlery, and writing materials, thread and tape of the most glaring colours, tobacco, twine, lidless boxes full of gigantic brass and steel thimbles, harlequin leather balls, silk kerchiefs, and samples of sugar, coffee, and liquorice.

The shop itself was a long narrow room, with a very town-like counter, behind which were shelves reaching to the ceiling well stored with printed cottons, woollen stuffs, and cloth; while on the opposite wall, placed conveniently within reach of customers, there were various implements of husbandry, fishing-tackle, wooden toys, and a great variety of straw and felt hats. Madame Cramer,

a cheerful-looking little woman, dressed in a dark cotton gown by no means unfashionably made, and with partially grey hair neatly and becomingly braided, bent over the counter and asked Nora in what way she could serve her.

Nora requested to see some straw hats, but having, while looking at them, mentioned that she was the bearer of messages from Ammergau, Madame Cramer pushed them aside and began to speak of her relations and of her son, in amusing forgetfulness of her duties as shopkeeper. Nora was soon made aware that in Florian all her hopes and affections were centred; on him all the money she and her husband had saved had been expended; her greatest sorrow in life had been parting with him, though but for a time. 'For he went to study in Munich,' she said, proudly, 'and is an artist, and would have remained there until he had made himself renowned; but the old man died, and the village wanted a painter, so he came back, though with a heavy heart; and when we talked over matters together, and he told me what hundreds and hundreds of painters were in Munich, and how many more years he must study before he could hope to be what he intended, I could not help



advising him to retain his father's privilege of being village painter, which afforded a good and creditable subsistence, and proposed spending all the ready money I possessed in building an addition to the house. Well, Miss, after some hesitation he consented, and for his sake I refused to marry the baker; and what with the building of his own *ately*, as he calls his workshop, and the repairs of altars in the churches, and the gildings, and the carvings, he was wonderfully contented for some time, but,' she added with a sigh, 'that did not last long, he could not take kindly to the other work—'

'What other work?' asked Nora.

'The house-painting and varnishing,' she answered; 'and I cannot blame him, for it is below him, as I may say, now that he is an artist, and paints so beautifully in the style of Michael Angely! You'll step up stairs I hope, Miss, and look at his cartoons?'

'I should like to see them very much,' answered Nora; 'but it is still so early, that I have time enough to look at your printed calicos, and choose one of these straw hats for my mountain walks, before we disturb him.'

The hat she chose was very coarse, very stiff,

and bore a strong resemblance to a flattened extinguisher. She did not, to the great surprise of Madame Cramer, look in the small glass to see whether or not it were becoming; and when some ribbon was afterwards produced for her inspection, she merely said, 'Black, if you please,' and began an examination of the cottons and stuffs on the shelves behind the counter.

'I shall require some of these things before long,' she observed, mounting the little ladder that enabled her to take a view of the contents of the upper shelf, 'and then you must tell me the prices.'

'If you would like to have the marks explained,' said Madame Cramer, 'I'm sure I have no objection. It will not be necessary to have a second price when dealing with you, but the peasants are so accustomed to haggle and bargain, that they would think themselves cheated if I did not reduce my demand; so I always ask a kreutzer or two more than I afterwards take, and then they go away satisfied with themselves and with me.'

Nora was amused, and some time elapsed imperceptibly while she learned to keep shop. The mystic numbers and letters were made perfectly

intelligible to her, and also, in some degree, the profits and losses of a village trader. She learned that peasants incurred debts quite as readily, and often as thoughtlessly, as people in other ranks of life; some but paid an old account in order to commence a new one; and her proposal to Madame Cramer to insist on ready-money payments in future was answered by a shake of the head, and an assurance that all her customers would desert her, and go to one Hans Maier in the neighbouring town, who had injured her enough already by obliging her to keep many articles in her shop that remained long on hand.

Madame Cramer could not leave her shop, and Nora was conducted up stairs by a remarkably plain, red-haired, and very freckled girl, of the name of Vevey. She was the adopted daughter of Madame Cramer, and Nora, struck by her likeness to some one she had seen occasionally at the inn, asked her if she had any relation there.

‘The sennerin on the landlord’s alp is my sister,’ she answered, smiling, ‘and you have seen her perhaps every Sunday morning. I shall make her guess who spoke of her when I go to the alp to-morrow.’

‘Rather tell me at what hour you leave the village,’ said Nora, ‘for I should greatly like to go with you.’

‘When you please, miss ; it is quite an easy path, and hardly two hours’ walk.’

‘I must choose the latest hour possible,’ said Nora, ‘as I hope to induce some others to join us who are not very early risers.’

Vevey now led the way along a short passage, tapped rather timidly at a door, and having obtained permission to enter, held it open for Nora to pass her, and then closed it, and withdrew so noiselessly, that Florian continued his occupation totally unconscious of the presence of a stranger. He was a pale, dark-haired, small man, with a perfectly picturesque beard, open shirt collar, and well-daubed linen blouse, and stood before a cast-iron cross intended for the churchyard. Though only painting it black to defend it from rust, his posture was that of an artist before his easel ; and he seemed to encourage the delusion, by having hung his pot of black paint on the thumb of his left hand, as if it had been a palette, stopping occasionally to look at the progress of his work, and turning his head from side to side in a manner that greatly amused

Nora, until, on a nearer approach, she perceived that there was a small picture in the centre of the cross, which might be supposed to have caused the pantomime.

Nora's visits to artists' studios had been frequent enough in former times to make her acquainted with the almost unavoidable litter and disorder usual in such places, but anything like that around her now she had never beheld. Beside the usual casts of legs and arms in plaster of Paris, half finished pictures, sketches, palettes, brushes and colours, there were all the more ordinary requisites for house-painting. Window-frames were placed with portraits against the wall to dry, and near them a couple of small coffins of a bright blue colour, such as were usually placed *over* the graves of children in the churchyard. On shelves round the room there was a large collection of distemper colours in earthenware pots, and numerous filigree arabesque patterns for the decoration of the walls of rooms and ceilings, while angels with broken wings, saints with tarnished draperies, and various pieces of curiously carved wood still awaited repairs from the skilful hand of the village artist.

How long Meister Florian might have continued

to advance and retire before the black cross, had he not been interrupted by Nora, it is hard to say. He started when she addressed him, made some apology for having supposed her Genoveva, and then, for her use, began to disencumber an old brown leather chair of its accumulated lumber. Nora did not wait for the completion of this operation, but began at once to speak of Ammergau and his relations there, the great drama and the wood carvers.

Florian's embarrassment was at an end; he listened attentively, and answered eagerly. She spoke of Munich and his studies there, and asked to see some drawings. Willingly he brought his large portfolio, and exhibited a succession of copies in chalks from well-known busts and statues; but they bore testimony to more assiduity than talent. His attempts in oils were of the same description; and Nora saw that though he might in time, and with perseverance, become perhaps a good copyist, he was no genius struggling with adverse fate, as she had been somewhat romantically inclined to imagine him.

'I wonder you have not tried landscape painting,' she observed, after having patiently listened to his complaints about the difficulty of getting

people to sit for their portraits. 'In such a country as this you could never be at a loss for studies, and mountains, lakes, and trees must submit to be sketched and painted how and when you please.'

'I have not the slightest inclination for landscapes,' he answered; 'my ambition was to paint altar-pieces for churches, but I have never arrived at composing anything. Perhaps I have not studied enough, for even in portrait-painting I am often at a loss. The miller's Madeleine was the only person who ever sat as often and as long as I wished; but she has since said that I made a scarecrow of her, and that I required a whole morning to paint the mole on her throat; while Count Waldemar, as she expressed it, "had her down in his pocket-book in a quarter of an hour, as like as two peas, and no mole at all!"'

'It is difficult to paint female portraits satisfactorily,' observed Nora. 'Women expect to be idealized, and to have their defects either concealed or altogether omitted.'

'That mole is no defect,' said Florian, 'I think it beautiful.'

Nora smiled, and observed that he seemed to

have employment enough to put portrait-painting out of his head.

‘I cannot complain,’ he answered, looking round his room, ‘there is employment enough—such as it is!’

‘They told me at Ammergau,’ she added, ‘that the renovation of the altars at St. Hubert’s had been confided to you, and that is by all accounts a very flattering distinction.’

‘True,’ said Florian, with heightened colour. ‘I get as much work of that kind as I can manage to do; but you see, mademoiselle, my mother is from Ammergau, and I have a sort of natural talent for wood carving. These old altars are crowded with figures in alto or basso relievo, and it is not everyone who can supply the lost or broken arms, legs, and even heads, so easily as I can.’

‘And,’ asked Nora, ‘has that never led you to suppose that as wood carver you might be more successful than as a painter?’

‘Yes,’ he replied, with a sigh; ‘but wood carving is a common talent, both here and in Tyrol, and no one ever became rich or renowned by it!’

‘Fortunately, thousands of people are very happy without being either,’ said Nora, turning from him



to examine the old altar, with its folding doors and figures about a foot high in alto relievo, representing the legend of Saint Hubert being converted to Christianity by seeing a crucifix on the head of the stag of which he had long been in pursuit. The interest she expressed in his careful and judicious reparations seemed greatly to gratify Florian, and he hoped, if she intended to visit the chapel of the sainted huntsman, it would be at the time when he also should be there.

‘I may as well confess that I came here intending to propose some such arrangement,’ she answered; ‘but besides St. Hubert’s I wish to see the Wild Alp, and the Kerbstein lake.’

‘Seppel will be a better guide to the lake,’ said Florian, ‘but to St. Hubert’s or any of the alps about here, I can show you the way as well as—as—if I had been out with a rifle, and knew where a wildscheutz was likely to find a welcome and breakfast in case of need.’

‘And have you never been out in the way you describe?’ asked Nora archly, and not much fearing that the suspicion would give offence.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘though I have little doubt that many would think more of me if I had. A

man who cannot handle a rifle has a hard stand here; there is no end to the joking and laughing about him; even the women cannot spare their jibes, and are always making comparisons, and lauding the foresters to the skies! I have heard it said that in towns the soldiers are made much of by them; but in the villages about here the foresters are better off still—it is forester here, and forester there, and one never hears of anything else!

Nora pretty well understood the drift of this speech, but she betrayed no consciousness, as she acknowledged having herself rather a predilection for foresters; their dress was so picturesque; their employments so manly; and they had all a certain ease of manner that was irresistibly pleasing.

‘Ease of manner!’ exclaimed Florian. ‘I dare say—and no wonder—they keep good company! All the noblemen and bureaucratists of the neighbourhood pay court to them for an occasional day’s shooting; and their wives are civil to make sure of getting venison. Old General Falkner, who is as proud a man as can well be, makes no guest so welcome at St. Benedict’s as the forester; the captain’s first visit, when he comes home on

leave of absence, is to the Forest-house; and even Count Waldemar himself, who speaks to me whenever and wherever we meet, has not a word if the forester be present, or his assistant only drop a hint about having seen a chamois or roe on the mountains!

‘Did you never think of becoming a forester yourself?’ asked Nora, wishing to turn his thoughts from his jealous grievances, for such she knew them to be.

‘I had not health or strength for it,’ he answered; ‘but even had it been otherwise, my whole thoughts were bent on being a painter. As soon as I was free from the day-school, I began to carry my father’s paints; when I left off attending the Sunday-school, I learned his trade, thinking, in my ignorance, that it was a good foundation for my future career; and I ended by going to Munich, with ideas so contracted, that I supposed technical skill all that was necessary to make me a celebrated artist!’

‘A very natural mistake on your part,’ observed Nora, ‘when one takes into consideration the trade you had learned from your father.’

‘Perhaps so; but coming into a knowledge of one’s ignorance is not agreeable, Mademoiselle. It

seemed as if the more I learned the less I knew.'

'That is the case with most people,' said Nora, 'and is by no means confined to artists and their studies.'

'I got into despair at last,' continued Florian; 'tried portrait-painting, but soon discovered that the photographers were competitors with whom only first-rate artists could contend; so, when my father died, I returned home and established myself as his successor. My mother and Genoveva were made happy, they say, but I'm sure I don't know why, for I give them both a great deal of trouble, and am often ungrateful for their attentions. Vevey especially has had a hard life lately; but my mother is kind to her, and in return she has patience with me.'

Nora, who had long been standing beside the half-open door, now took leave. He accompanied her down the stairs, promising, as he opened the door of the shop, to let her know when he had completed the renovation of the altar for St. Hubert's.

Great was Nora's surprise to find her cousin John in eager discussion with Madame Cramer, about the purchase of some very coarse, dark-green

cloth, to make what he called a 'rain mantle.' 'A famous thing,' as he immediately explained to her, 'worn by all the men employed in felling wood on the mountains.' To judge by the pattern, it was a very formless garment, with merely an opening in the centre for the head; nevertheless, some seams it must have had, for it was to be sent to the tailor, and the measure of John's shoulders was carefully taken by Madame Cramer.

'I thought you had all sorts of waterproof jackets and caps?' observed Nora.

'Well, so I have, but I prefer being dressed like other people. There is no use in making oneself remarkable, you know; and I may be in places where being known by my coat might prove troublesome.'

'Am I to understand, Jack,' said Nora, 'that you have found some one to go out deer-stalking with you?'

'Deer-stalking or chamois-hunting, as the case may be,' he answered, seating himself on the counter, and, in the full security of not being understood by any one but his cousin, continuing, 'I have been thinking, Nora, that I must begin to limit my confessions to you; and, indeed, for your

own sake, you had better ask me no questions in future about where I am going, or what I intend to do. You see, dear girl, if you know too much, you may in the end be obliged to bear witness against me, and you wouldn't like to do that, I am sure !'

'I thought,' said Nora, reproachfully, 'I thought you would have waited a week or ten days longer, until Mr. Torp had left the village.'

'He has no intention of leaving,' said John. 'I heard him say that the scarcity of game enhanced its value; and that he believed an Englishman liked wandering through a picturesque country just as well as a German, though he might talk less about it. He seems to enjoy himself here, this Mr. Torp, and likes wearing his tweed jacket and wide-awake—and hunting, and fishing, and playing skittles, and pretending not to see us, and all the rest of it; and I tell you, Nora, he has no more idea of leaving the village than we have. The forester's son is going out to-morrow to look after some chamois that were seen above the Wild Alp; and the day after, Torp and Waldemar are to hunt there. Now they all know I wish to join them, but not one can invite me, because that fellow Torp won't allow them !'

‘You have not yet tried Captain Falkner.’

‘Yes I have,’ answered John. ‘He is evidently flirting with Georgy, so I asked him yesterday, point-blank, to let me shoot on his ground—and what do you think he said? His father had given up hunting; he himself was only occasionally at home on leave of absence, and that they had now let their chase to the forester: he had only reserved a right for himself, and was obliged to purchase his own game when his mother wished for it! I saw he was sorry he could not oblige me—more, of course, on Georgy’s account than mine; and he even proposed speaking to the forester; but as I did not choose him to know that, at Torp’s instigation, I had already been refused in that quarter, I requested him to say nothing about the matter, for that I could amuse myself walking about on the mountains, and making excursions into Tyrol.’

‘I wish you would, for the present, be satisfied with doing so,’ said Nora, earnestly.

‘I am much more likely to have a shot at the chamois, near the Wild Alp, before any of them,’ cried John, exultingly.

‘Then I may not hope that you will go with me to our landlord’s alp to-morrow?’

John shook his head, and turning to Madame Cramer, requested, in broken but very intelligible German, that his woodman's mantle might be made in the course of the next few hours, as he should probably want it that very evening.

Nora left the shop with him, and walked towards the inn without asking another question, or attempting remonstrances that she knew would be useless.



## CHAPTER IX.

### TREATS OF MARRIAGE AND OTHER MATTERS.

NORA found her uncle and Georgina still sitting at the breakfast-table, and was at first somewhat provoked at the little inclination shown to join her alp party. Now, though she did not, perhaps, very particularly desire their company, the appearance of separating herself so completely from them as of late, was not quite in accordance with her ideas of propriety, so she combated with some pertinacity all Georgina's objections.

'Change of weather to be expected!' she repeated; 'not in the least probable for some days. The wind blows out of the mountains in the morning, and into them during the day, in the most satisfactory manner.'

'But I have heard,' said Georgina, 'that the alps about here lie very high, and the excursions to them are, in consequence, exceedingly fatiguing.'

'We are not going to a high alp; the cattle

have already left most of them. The one I mean is quite easy of ascent.'

'I dare say, however,' rejoined Georgina, 'that there are places without a path, and rocks to be scrambled over, and springs and rivulets in all directions, to wet one's feet.'

Nora could not deny the probability of such impediments being in the way, but suggested that strong boots would make the path of little importance, especially after a continuance of fine weather, such as they had lately had.

'They say,' persisted Georgina, 'that one generally arrives at such places ravenously hungry; and there is nothing to eat but dreadfully greasy messes, such as the peasants here delight in—and they might disagree with papa, you know!'

'I shall take care that no such messes be set before him,' said Nora, good-humouredly.

'I'm afraid of nothing but the too warm weather,' observed Mr. Nixon.

'And I,' said Georgina, 'am much more afraid of—of—'

'Of what?'

'Of the dirt and smoke,' she replied, with a slight grimace.

‘But we are not going to sleep there, and I am quite sure that where I propose going every thing will be perfectly clean.’

‘John has had experience, Nora, and he assures me—’

‘Most probably,’ said Nora, interrupting her, ‘John did not want to have you with him. He does not wish for my company either, but found other means to prevent me from joining him.’

‘That may be the case,’ rejoined Georgina, thoughtfully, ‘for when I first came here I really intended to make some excursions; but he told me at once that they were not the sort of thing I should like, and that a— in short, my feet were better fitted for parquet floors than mountain paths.’

‘I think,’ said Mr. Nixon, with a sly smile and a wink to Nora, ‘I think that was said by the captain at St. Benedict’s, as we were getting out of the boat, Georgy.’

‘Well, perhaps it was,’ she answered, her colour a good deal deeper than usual; ‘he, too, rather dissuaded me from undertaking any expeditions of the kind, and he has a sister—’

‘Who,’ said Nora, ‘has most probably been on every mountain in the neighbourhood.’

‘Yes, but made herself quite ill last year by attempting to follow a Countess Schaumberg from Vienna, who, he tells me, can use a rifle and hunt as well as the keenest sportsman, and from his account must be a specimen of a German masculine woman. In England, when we become manly, we turn completely to the stable, talk of horses and delight in slang; this countess does not ride, or even drive a pony carriage, but she has a choice collection of fire-arms, and takes her chasseur and dogs wherever she goes.’

‘When is she expected here?’ asked Nora.

‘In about a fortnight or three weeks. She comes here for the marriage of Captain Falkner’s sister, who has long been engaged to Count Carl Benndorff of Herrenburg Achenanger Drachenthal.’

‘How well you pronounce these hard words,’ said Nora, laughing; ‘one would think you had been taking lessons in German.’

‘Well, so she has,’ said her father with a significant grimace, ‘she is reading a book of poetry with the captain, and seems to get on famously;

but she can't understand other people's German, or talk a word to the little boy who catches minnows for me when I want bait.'

'Perhaps,' said Nora demurely, 'my proposed alp party might have interfered with the German lessons?'

'Not far wrong, Nora,' cried Mr. Nixon, with a loud laugh. 'Come, Georgy, tell the truth and shame the devil. If Nora had said the day *after* to-morrow you would have made less difficulties—a certain person will be out hunting then, you know.'

Georgina's colour again deepened as she said that she had not thought of Captain Falkner when objecting to the alp party.

'Well,' said Mr. Nixon, nudging Nora as she sat beside him, 'well, *I'm* not ashamed to say that if you will put off your excursion until the day after to-morrow we shall be happy to join you, eh Georgy? To-morrow, you see, the captain might expect us to—no matter what—we couldn't disappoint him, you know—on no account—he might be unhappy or offended, for the captain is very fond of us, he is! and I, for my part, shouldn't mind confessing to you, if Georgy was out of the way, that

I'm uncommon taken with him. He doesn't sit at my end of the boat, and has lately begun to ride on the beach, almost, indeed, turning his back to me; but it's all for the purpose of teaching Georgy German—she has told me so a hundred times, and I must believe her—he has not a thought beyond that book of songs—'

'Sonnets,' said Georgina, joining half unwittingly in Nora's merry laugh.

When Mr. Nixon left them together a short time afterwards, some minutes elapsed before either of them spoke a word. At length Georgina, while playing diligently with her lace-sleeves and bracelets observed, 'M. Waldemar improves on acquaintance, Nora; we begin to think him very gentlemanlike.'

'I never thought him otherwise,' said Nora; 'he is very unaffected, agreeable, and gay, and forms a most pleasing contrast to our cold proud countryman, Mr. Torp.'

'Who certainly does give himself wonderful airs for a Mr. Torp!' said Georgina, scornfully. 'I am rather glad he avoids our acquaintance, though I am inclined to think he is not quite so insignificant a person as I at first supposed; he is not vulgar or pompous, and his insufferable arrogance I now begin

to think may proceed from his having a large fortune, and considering himself an object of speculation to designing young ladies. Nesbitt tells me he has a servant who dresses as well or rather better than his master, and walks about all day amusing himself; it seems, too, he imitates Mr. Torp in manners as well as dress, declines all the civil advances of Monsieur Adam and Mrs. Nesbitt, and was so seldom heard to speak that for a long time people could not find out whether he were German, English, or French!

‘I suppose, however,’ said Nora, ‘the interesting discovery has been made at last?’

‘Nesbitt says that Adam’s abuse of a Russian family with whom he had travelled last year, roused him in so unusual a manner that little doubt now remains of his being a Russian.’

‘Did you really feel any curiosity on this subject, Georgina?’ asked Nora, surprised.

‘Only inasmuch as it proves that this Mr. Torp has probably travelled about a good deal.’

‘Oh, if you care to know,’ said Nora, ‘M. Waldemar told me that his friend had been for the last ten years almost constantly on the continent.’

‘I should rather like to know something about him and his family,’ said Georgina.

‘Why?’ asked Nora.

‘Because one naturally feels curious about a person with whom one has spent some weeks under the same roof in a small village like this. Captain Falkner has seen him very seldom, I believe, and calls him generally “my friend’s friend,” as if to prove that he knows nothing about him.’

‘I cannot say that I feel the slightest interest or curiosity concerning him,’ observed Nora, carelessly.

‘Perhaps you will not say so when I tell you that M. Waldemar is not, as I supposed, an artist by profession: he is the eldest son of a Count Benndorff, a Tyrolean nobleman of very old family—.’ She paused, as if expecting some demonstration of surprise on the part of Nora.

‘Well,’ said the latter, smiling, ‘do you not remember my telling you not to judge of people by their coats or shoes in the mountains here: I said it was even possible he might be a prince in disguise!’

‘I do recollect your saying something to that purport,’ said Georgina; ‘and it is odd enough that he probably will be a prince in the course of time.’



Papa says these foreign titles are perfectly worthless, and Mrs. Savage Wayward told me, before I left England, that I should find princes, counts, and barons like mushrooms in Germany. They don't seem quite so plenty, after all, which is curious when one considers that all the children inherit the parental title.'

'Captain Falkner's instructions,' observed Nora, 'have apparently not been confined altogether to the song-book as my uncle calls it.'

'No,' answered Georgina, 'he speaks good English and excellent French, so we have discussed a variety of subjects.'

'Such as, for instance—' said Nora, and then she paused with a look of interrogation.

'Whether I could make up my mind to remain in Germany—"for good," as papa says when he means for ever.'

'And do you feel disposed to resign the pomps and vanities of the London world, and retire to the cloisters of St. Benedict's?'

'Unfortunately that is only a happiness in perspective,' answered Georgina, 'for Captain Falkner cannot or will not give up his profession as long as there is what he calls a chance of war.'

‘And you like him well enough to follow his regiment, and submit to the discomforts of country quarters in Hungary, Transylvania, or elsewhere?’

‘I requested twenty-four hours for consideration,’ replied Georgina, gravely. ‘After being so often and, as you know, so recently deceived in my expectations, I resolved to attach no importance to Captain Falkner’s attentions, and was therefore completely taken by surprise yesterday evening. If you had not come here this morning I should have gone to you for advice, knowing no one more competent to give it.’

‘Had you so spoken ten years ago,’ said Nora, ‘I should have discussed this matter in a manner that would have convinced you I was worthy of the confidence placed in my wisdom; for my mother having herself made two love matches, and neither proving particularly happy, educated me in an almost overstrained rational manner, making me not at all disposed to fall in love myself, or fancy others in love with me. At the age of sixteen or seventeen I might have been reasoned or have reasoned myself into almost any proposed *mariage de convenance*, while now, strange to say, at six-and-

twenty I feel myself growing seriously sentimental and romantic, and consider love the chief desideratum.'

'I think I may take it for granted that Captain Falkner likes me,' said Georgina, smiling, 'and I like him, not perhaps quite as well as—one who never really cared for me. But I am tired of struggling in the world of fashion, and am no longer young, have no wish to end my life as the unmarried one of the family ; and my chances are few at home, Nora, for the increase of the female population in England is monstrous they say. So all things considered—'

'All things considered,' said Nora, laughing, 'you have made up your mind to marry, and only ask advice in the hope of being confirmed in your resolution. Now I begin to think that I can scarcely venture to give an opinion on this occasion, having scarcely seen Captain Falkner half-a-dozen times. In fact, were he to burst upon my dazzled sight in the full glory of his Austrian uniform at this moment, I should positively not know him. Don't you think, instead of the grey jacket and straw hat, you could persuade him to dress himself in all his accoutrements for our gratification, when he comes

this evening formally to demand your hand of my uncle? Dress *does* make such a difference, as Bob Acres says.'

'Nora, you are laughing at me,' cried Georgina, a good deal discomposed.

'I ought rather to envy you,' replied Nora, seriously, 'for you have evidently gained the affection of an honourable man, who, without knowing anything of your family or fortune, tells you he loves you, and asks you in marriage. I have never had the happiness of being loved in this manner, Georgina; but so highly have I learned to value a perfectly disinterested attachment, that I would willingly give all I possess to be able to inspire any one with such an affection for me. Of this, however, there is now no chance, so I must take the place you decline, and become the "unmarried one" of our family.'

'Then,' said Georgina, smiling cheerfully, 'then you do not think I am about to do a foolish thing, Nora?'

'Certainly not,' answered Nora, moving towards the door, 'that is, if you are quite sure that you love him.'

On descending to the road before the inn, she

perceived a number of children just released from school, dispersing homewards; the boys whooped, whistled, shoved and cuffed each other, playing at ball with their caps, hats, and books, as boys will do to the end of time most probably. A mad-cap girl occasionally attempted to join in the rough sport, but as often retreated, hurt or frightened, to more quiet companions. She was scarcely well received by the groups of little girls, who, with arms entwined, were confidentially whispering to each other their little secrets, or perhaps animadverting severely on her unruly conduct. Two very youthful maidens lingered among the feeding-troughs for horses, ranged along the wall of the inn, and Nora perceived at once that they were imitating their mothers, and enjoying a little gossip.

‘It was when I was going to school this very morning that I heard her,’ said one little chatter-box to the other; ‘“Adieu, Count Waldemar,” says she, “and a pleasant journey home,” says she.’

‘Well, to be sure, the courage that she has!’ interposed the other. ‘As mother says, the boldness of that girl is not to be believed.’

‘And,’ continued the first, ‘“A pleasant jour-

ney home," says she, "Count Waldemar," and runs away, and he after her, and laughs and lifts her up ever so high and shakes her.'

'I'm glad of it,' said number two; 'many a shake she gets from her mother, and well she deserves them.'

'She didn't mind the shake a bit,' said the first speaker, 'for the count told the landlady to give her the biggest piece of cake in the house, and she came running after me with a lump of kugelhopp full of currants and covered with almonds, and she as proud as a peacock.'

'Well,' said number two, 'I couldn't think where she got that cake: it was very good, and she gave me a piece of it, and Catty, and Lina, and—'

'She did not dare to offer me any,' said the first speaker, with proud propriety. 'I had seen her pertness, and taxed her with it. To speak to the count and he getting into the carriage, and the strange gentleman from England, and all the people of the inn, and the postilion from the town standing by!'

Here Nora, not altogether uninterested in their discourse, moved towards the speakers, but after a hurried frightened curtsy, they both scampered off,

and she turned to the little romp, who, having been thrown down in a concluding scuffle, was now rubbing the dust and gravel from her pink petticoat and black boddice, while a red-haired boy, riding on one of the feeding-troughs, alone remained to pity or enjoy her discomfiture. She looked up as Nora approached, and showed a pretty, round, sunburnt face that no doubt had attracted the artist eye of Count Waldemar, and made him acquainted with her. She was not at all shy, and laughed as Nora shook some gravel from her thick curly hair, and asked who had thrown her down.

‘Red Hans,’ said the little girl, pointing to the grinning, freckled-faced boy, who was moving about on the trough in a reckless manner, making movements with his long, dangling, bare legs, as if spurring a horse.

‘And who is Red Hans?’

‘He belongs to the widow at Waltenburg.’

‘And you?’

‘I’m the hammersmith’s Nanerl. Come, Hans, let’s go home to dinner.’

The boy instantly descended from his imaginary horse and came towards her. ‘Nanerl won’t tell,’ he said, glancing towards Nora. ‘She knows I’d

get no dinner from the hammersmith if she made a complaint.'

'Why don't you go home to dinner?' asked Nora.

'Cause mother's so poor, and the hammersmith said I could have a bit with Nanerl every day.'

'I'm afraid you're a very naughty boy,' said Nora; 'you ought to take care of her instead of throwing her down, as you did just now.'

Hans looked embarrassed.

'He's a scamp,' said the little girl, promptly. Father says so, and mother too; but I like him, and we play at wildschuetz together.'

'And you are the sennerin on the alp, and take care of the cows?'

'No, I'm a wildschuetz too,' she answered. 'Come along, Hans, I won't tell; come along.'

Glad to escape, he seized her hand and pulled her after him as he rushed down the road into the midst of the village.

Nora looked after them and smiled.

'Now that girl is regularly "doing the poor,"' muttered Torp to himself, as he peered from behind one of the old chestnut trees in the garden, beneath which he had breakfasted. 'I suppose,'



he continued, in soliloquy, 'she is waiting for Waldemar, expecting him to go to the ruins with her. "*Mees Nora,*" you may wait long; by this time I should think your adorer must be in Tyrol.'

Had Waldemar been beside him, Torp would have turned away his head, to prove his total indifference to the presence of so insignificant a personage as a Miss Nora Nixon, whereas he now thought proper to indulge his curiosity without reserve, and for the first time took a long and steady stare at the unconscious Nora, as she stood on the road between the garden and the inn. Dressed, as usual, in a check black and grey silk, he thought her figure as graceful as any he had seen for a long time; and even beneath the hideous coarse straw hat the delicate little face appeared to such advantage that he magnanimously rejoiced in the absence of his friend, and applauded himself for his disinterested conduct.

Just as Nora was about to walk away, she perceived the forester's son, Franz, coming towards the village; he hastened his steps, and advanced so directly towards her, that she first stopped, and then moved a few steps to meet him.

'Oh ho! what is the meaning of all this?' thought

Torp, as the young man, raising his hat, exhibited a pale, agitated face, and began to speak with an eagerness and vehemence of action very different from his usual tranquil manner.

Nora's cheerful smile faded away, and a look of deep interest spread over her features as she listened, and began to walk slowly along the road with him.

'Madeleine said you were at the mill, Mademoiselle,' observed Franz, 'and that you can bear witness that she told black Sepp she did not care for him, and would not marry him.'

'I remember hearing her say so,' replied Nora.

'He reminded her,' continued Franz, 'of some promise that she had made years ago.'

Nora nodded assent.

'But,' he added, 'that is of no importance, for she must have been then almost a child; and she confesses having made promises of the same kind to half-a-dozen others before she was sixteen.'

Nora looked grave, but did not speak.

'She would have braved him if she had dared,' he continued; 'but her father, she says, has entered into solemn engagements with the Tyrolean, who contrived to make himself useful and necessary when the family were poor and in debt. It seems

he not only served without receiving wages, but even assisted them in various ways, all, as it now appears, on condition that Madeleine was to be his wife.'

'It is incomprehensible to me,' observed Nora, 'why the miller permitted an engagement with you under such circumstances.'

'I cannot say he was exactly willing,' said Franz; 'it was *my* father who urged it at Ammergau, on account of the fortune perhaps—and other friends helped, and laughed at the idea of the miller consulting his workman about the marriage of his daughter! I only thought of Madeleine's beauty, and the triumph of carrying her off from all the others, and so it was settled an hour after we came together.'

'Has Madeleine broken off her engagement with you altogether?' asked Nora.

'She said she must, for that her father, at black Sepp's instigation, had withdrawn his consent, and until his death she would have no fortune; I have none either, and must wait long to become forst-wart.'

'You seemed just now,' said Nora, after a pause,

‘to think I could be of use to you. I cannot, however, imagine in what way.’

‘Madeleine thought if you called on the priest, and got him to speak to her father and black Seppel, it might do good; they have both a great respect for his reverence.’

‘Could not her mother explain the state of the case better,’ suggested Nora.

‘Madeleine tells me her mother takes part with the miller, and is now more disposed towards the Tyrolean than me.’

‘That is not improbable,’ said Nora, musingly, and if you really think that my interference can be of use to you, I will go at once to the priest.’

‘Thank you, mademoiselle, you are very kind. His reverence is at home now, I am sure, and either in the garden or looking after his bees. I should not have given you this trouble, if Madeleine had not expressly forbidden any interference on my part, which, she said, would do no good, and only serve to irritate her father. She hoped that you, who had been so kind to Rosel, would not refuse to help her, and it seems she was not mistaken.’

‘Will you wait here to be made acquainted with the result of the conference?’ asked Nora.

‘I cannot,’ he answered, ‘for Count Waldemar sent express for me this morning, to tell me that he was going home, and must trust altogether to me to find sport for his friend from England, as the captain at St. Benedict’s had said he had no time at present to call on the gentleman, or go out hunting with him; so I must now look after some chamois, said to be in the neighbourhood of the Wild Alp, and I’m glad of the walk, or anything that takes me from the village just now.’

He opened the wicket of the priest’s garden, bowed low as she passed him, and stood looking after her; when she entered the open door of the house, and commenced a conversation with the old housekeeper, who had advanced to meet her.

Unperceived by both, Torp sauntered along the road, his hands thrust into the pockets of his shooting jacket, his eyes fixed on the sunny summit of the mountain that rose high above the shingled roof of the parsonage.

Light, and airy, and clean, like all the priests’ houses Nora had ever seen in Germany, was this one also. It seemed as if everything had been

just freshly scoured ; and when the door of the reception room was opened, she found herself in precisely the sort of apartment she had expected. Two side, and three front windows were furnished with very white thin muslin curtains carefully draped aside ; there were six chairs, a round table, a sofa, and two chests of drawers in the room ; on one of the latter, a well carved crucifix, on the other a pair of silver candlesticks. She had scarcely time to look round her, when the door of an adjoining room was opened, and a middle-aged, intelligent, and rather solemn-looking man advanced towards her ; his coat was very long, his cravat very stiff, his high forehead rendered higher by incipient baldness, and his carefully-shaved cheeks and chin remarkably blue coloured. He approached Nora with a succession of slight, shy bows ; and as he stopped before her, and placed his right hand slowly in the bosom of his coat, the peculiar priestly movement betrayed to her at once *his* embarrassment, and removed hers.

Accepting the offered chair, she informed him of as much of the miller's story as she felt herself at liberty to relate, and he listened to her throughout with the most undeviating attention, observing,

when she paused for an answer, that ‘He was not surprised, but sorry for what had occurred, on account of the forester’s family; he should scarcely feel justified in speaking to the miller in the manner she desired; and had little hope of influencing the Tyrolean, who was in the habit of avoiding the church in Almenau, by crossing the mountains to visit his family, almost every Sunday and holy day; the man was violent and resolute, and not likely to listen to expostulations from any one.’

‘I regret to hear this,’ said Nora, ‘for he seems to have the miller completely in his power.’

A momentary flash of intelligence gleamed in the priest’s eyes, but passed as quickly as lightning; and it was with his eyes fixed on the ground that he observed, ‘The miller is a weak—a very weak—man, mademoiselle, and has unfortunately left his affairs completely to the superintendence of his chief workman during the last six years, and has become dependent on him: he was very poor when I came to reside here, but has since inherited a good deal of money from a brother, and his daughter as village heiress has been latterly the prize for which all the neighbouring peasants have

been contending. She has been the subject of more quarrels, and the cause of more brawls than she is worth; and knowing her to be an idle, pleasure-loving girl, you must excuse my saying that a separation from her would be the greatest piece of good fortune that could happen to the young assistant forester.'

'Unfortunately he does not think so,' said Nora, 'and he and Madeleine now place their whole reliance on you.'

'I shall speak to *him* this evening, and I hope to some purpose,' he answered dryly.

'You will not find him at home, as he is going to the Wild Alp,' rejoined Nora; 'and if what I have said has led you to form the design of dissuading him from a renewal of his engagement, I have indeed proved but a sorry advocate, and had better cease to plead.'

'Mademoiselle,' said the priest, politely, 'no better advocate could have been chosen on this occasion; I have heard of your generosity to Rosel, and can assure you it is not misplaced; she is, and always has been a good girl; her brother also is worthy of regard, and you cannot be more interested in his welfare than I am. I have



hitherto avoided all interference in the marriages of my parishioners: they are generally rational contracts made by the parents, in which the parties most concerned are so little consulted, that the refusal to bestow a cow or calf has not unfrequently broken off a match in every respect desirable. Now I have little doubt that interested motives induced the forester to propose his son to the miller for his daughter.'

'I understood,' said Nora, 'that Franz and Madeleine had long been attached to each other.'

'Madeleine's attachments,' said the priest, with a contemptuous smile, 'have been very numerous. Franz has not lived at home for many years; and though I think it more than probable that he admires Madeleine, who is considered very handsome, I suspect she accepted him for the purpose of becoming, in the course of time, a forester's or perhaps even a forstmeister's wife, and being able to wear a bonnet.'

'Wear a bonnet!' repeated Nora, 'could she not wear one now if she pleased?'

'No, mademoiselle, a peasant's daughter does not wear a bonnet in this country; but what I

meant to express was, that Madeleine's ambition was to become a lady.'

'Oh,' said Nora, 'I understand you now.'

'Yet I was not speaking in the least metaphorically,' continued the priest; 'Franz has been to the forester academy, will receive a place under government, and, as his wife, there is nothing to prevent Madeleine from substituting a bonnet for the peasant hat, or still simpler black kerchief so universally worn here. The silver-laced boddice, short skirt, and apron will be thrown aside, and replaced by a modish gown, and the ignorant, vain girl will fancy the metamorphosis complete.'

'She will look uncommonly pretty in any dress,' said Nora. 'I have seldom seen more perfect features.'

'Mademoiselle,' said the priest, almost reproachfully, 'you attach too much importance to beauty. I could prove to you that the plainest girl in this village is by many degrees the cleverest and most amiable!'

'Oh pray tell me all about her,' cried Nora, eagerly, 'you can in no way oblige me more than by giving me information concerning the people here.'

‘If that be the case,’ said the priest, ‘perhaps you will go to the school-house with me, and look over the judgment books.’

The school-house was not far distant. An unpretending building, in no way differing from the others in the village, excepting that the whole of the ground floor was required for the large school-room, which was amply lighted by side and front windows, and furnished with long rows of benches and desks, suited to the different ages of the pupils, and increasing progressively in height as they receded towards the door. A broad space in the middle of the room served to separate the boys from the girls, and afforded the school-master a place, which he constantly perambulated, to the no small terror of idle or mischievous children.

As Nora and the priest advanced into the school-room, Torp’s head might have been seen at one of the open windows thrust through the clustering leaves of a vine trained against the wall of the house. There was a mixture of curiosity and irony in the expression of his face as he listened to Nora’s questions, and saw her poring over the large blue books so willingly presented to her for

inspection by the schoolmaster. It is probable she asked questions he had no objection to hear answered, as he remained at the window, and even stretched forward once or twice as if he also wished to see the contents of the judgment books.

When Nora took leave, followed to the door by both her companions, she found Rosel waiting for her near the church, and they soon after entered the footpath in the wood that led to the ruins of Waltenburg.

At some distance before her Nora soon perceived Torp. Why he just then chose to go where, from her conversation with Waldemar the previous evening, he knew he was likely to meet her, she could not well imagine. It never occurred to her, that, unconscious of the information she had obtained of Waldemar's departure, both from the schoolchildren and Franz, he felt a mischievous pleasure in the expectation of seeing her sitting on some fragment of the ruin confidently expecting the arrival of his friend! Yet it must be confessed that this idea had for some minutes served to amuse Torp, when he first turned into the wood, and seemed to recur, when, having scrambled to a prominent place on a weather-beaten wall, he looked

down with laughing eyes, and watched her progress over the few mouldering planks that supplied the place of the drawbridge.

Scarcely, however, had she and Rosel entered the precincts of the ruin, and looked over the wall that commanded a view of the high road, than they heard a loud and joyous jodel, and saw soon afterwards a young man springing up the hill, flourishing his hat in the air, and followed more leisurely by an old peasant, whose long-tailed, short-waisted, grass-green coat made Nora instantly recognise the man now well known to her by the name of 'Crag's.'

Nora's inclination to build castles in the air on the ruins of Waltenburg instantly vanished, and she turned back to meet the old man and his son, who were evidently bearers of good news. With much pleasure she heard that the judge had appointed the following Thursday for the signing of the contract of resignation, and that he would that very afternoon come to Almenau to speak to her.

'About the thousand florins, you know, miss,' said the old man; 'for I told him I was sure you were ready to deposit the money in his

hands on Thursday, or even sooner, if it were necessary.'

'Quite right,' said Nora, smiling at the peasant's cunning way of informing her that she would be required to keep her promise sooner perhaps than she had expected.

'When I have once made up my mind to do a thing,' he continued, with much self-complaisance, 'I do it. And that's why I did not wait till next week to go into our town, but says to Seppel this morning says I—If the young lady is willing to make that agreement respecting the churchyard, says I, let's take her at her word, says I, and strike while the iron is hot.'

Again Nora smiled, and he continued: 'If it's agreeable to you, miss, the betrothal can take place at the forester's on Thursday evening, and before you leave the village I'll move with my old woman into the off house, and let Seppel bring home Rosel.'

'You could not do anything that would give me more pleasure,' said Nora.

She had scarcely ceased speaking when, more to her amusement than surprise, Seppel waved his hat in the air, and at the same time raising his right leg, he gave vent to his feelings of exultation

in a shout that caused Torp to look in some astonishment at the pantomime being performed on the green hill beneath him.

‘This very day,’ said Seppel, ‘I’ll go to the Kerbstein lake, and invite my mother’s brother to come to us on Thursday next.’

‘The fisherman there is your uncle,’ observed Nora.

‘And—my godfather, too, miss, and has done his duty by me handsome from beginning to end. I would not miss being the first to tell him of my betrothal for any consideration, so I’ll just run on, and take leave of my mother, and perhaps I may get to the lake before nightfall, if not, I can turn into one of the huts on the Wild Alp.’

‘The cattle have been driven down from want of pasture,’ shouted his father after him, as he bounded down before them. ‘You will not find a cow or sennerin on the whole mountain now!’

‘No matter,’ he answered, laughing, ‘the keys of the huts are to be found under the benches before the door, and I can have my choice of the lofts, and the hay in all of them!’

‘A spirited and a handsome fellow he is, there is no doubt of that,’ murmured old Crag, as he

plodded on beside Nora and her perfectly happy companion. 'I sometimes think a little of his life and energy would do Anderl no harm, but one can't have everything one wishes, and in respect of steadiness there's no comparison!'



## CHAPTER X.

### JACK'S FIRST EXPLOIT.

THE next day was partly spent by Nora in becoming better acquainted with Captain Falkner. She perceived that he knew more of Torp than he was at liberty to divulge even to Georgina, and rejoiced that the incognito was to be continued for some time longer, as she had learned to distrust her uncle's professions of indifference to rank, and feared that Torp's haughty reception of his civilities might put her patience to a severe test.

She accompanied her uncle to the lake at St. Benedict's, interpreted for him when he chose to talk to the people about the place, joined Georgina in trying to persuade Captain Falkner to leave the army, and made plans for the future in which, as possessor of Waltenburg, she was to be their nearest neighbour. She would have spent a pleasant day in the society of companions so evidently happy, had not John's absence caused her much unea-

siness. He had left them the day before after a hasty dinner, and laughing congratulations to his sister and Captain Falkner, and not having returned during the night she feared, and at last firmly believed, that he had gone, as he had said he would, to the Wild Alp. It was there, also, that Seppel had proposed to pass the night, and she knew not whether to suppose a planned meeting on both sides, or an unlucky chance that would inevitably lead to mutual temptation. She remembered, too, with increasing anxiety, that Franz had returned home for Torp during the previous evening, and that Rosel had mentioned having seen them pass the forest-house together just before she went to bed. Their destination was also the Wild Alp, and she dreaded to think what might occur there should a meeting take place.

Long, therefore, appeared the day, still longer the evening, but at last, leaving her uncle, Georgina, and Captain Falkner under one of the trees near the inn, she sauntered through the village, preoccupied and dejected, responding more laconically than was her wont to the 'Good evenings' wished her by the peasants who sat or stood before their doors. Scarcely, however, was she beyond the village,

and within sight of the forest-house, when she heard her name pronounced in a low, cautious manner, and on looking towards the place where the voice came she saw her cousin John, standing far above her in the deep shade of an old beech-tree. He seemed to have just descended from the summit of the mountain, along the steep side of which the road had been made; but instead of joining her, as she expected, he beckoned impatiently, and then receded still further into the wood, as if unwilling to be seen.

A good deal alarmed at his manner, Nora sprang up the bank, and when beside him looked anxiously into his face. It was still light enough for her to see him distinctly, and, under any other circumstances, she would have indulged in a hearty laugh, so oddly did his disordered hair and smutted face contrast with his smart English walking-dress: but the streaks of soot about the roots of his hair, and the comical prolongation of his eyebrows, produced hardly the shadow of a smile on her countenance, as, reassured of his personal safety by his presence, she said, gravely, 'I see, Jack, you have had your face blackened, and been out poaching.'

‘Call it wild hunting, if you please,’ he cried, embracing her somewhat turbulently, ‘and let me tell you, Nora, that I have no wish to be anything but a hunter of this sort, as long as I may chance to remain in this jolly country, for more exciting sport it is impossible to imagine; I would not have missed last night’s hunt, or this morning’s fun, for anything that could be offered me. But I have got into a little dilemma, Nora, out of which you must help me, and keep my secret into the bargain.’

‘A dilemma,’ she repeated; ‘oh, Jack, I hope it does not concern Seppel in any way! You do not know what unhappiness it will cause, if he should be detected, or even suspected just now. I say nothing of the consequences to yourself, but for a mere frolic to destroy irretrievably the prospects of a young man whose father has so lately consented to resign his property to him, that he may be able to marry the person to whom he has been so long—’

‘Oh, I know all that!’ he cried, interrupting her, ‘I’ve promised to dance at his wedding, if he has not to wait another half-dozen years before he celebrates it.’

‘Should he be brought before the judge as a

wildschuetz,' said Nora, 'there is an end to all his hopes, for his father will undoubtedly disinherit him!'

'There is much more danger of his being shot by your friend the forester, than brought before the judge,' said Jack. 'I never saw such a dare-devil of a fellow in my life, to say nothing of his having friends and accomplices at both sides of the mountains'

'And you have induced him to re-commence these dangerous and unlawful practices,' observed Nora, reproachfully, 'after his having refrained from them for upwards of six years!'

'Bosh!' cried Jack. 'The people about here may believe that, and think he never touches a rifle now; but he told me,—no matter what—a different story, at all events, and I must believe him, for he had his clothes in one house and his gun in another, and knew perfectly well where to find the key to the uninhabited *châlet* in which we blackened our faces.'

'On the Wild Alp, most probably,' said Nora, sorrowfully.

'The very place,' exclaimed Jack; 'but we did not remain long there, for directly after sunset we

began our hunt, and were joined by three fellows from Tyrol, who had seen no trace of chamois, though they had been out all the previous night. They proposed, however, giving me a "stand," as they called it, near a spot of ground that has been much frequented lately by deer; and, as we had famous moonlight, I had only to keep to leeward of the direction in which they were likely to come. But to get to this place, Nora, Seppel and I had to creep through narrow defiles and over rocks, to clamber up-hill on loose sand, through bushes and brambles, and, at last, actually to crawl like worms over stones and trunks of trees, cast about in all directions by one of those mountain-torrents now without a drop of water, though sometimes quite a broad, deep stream.'

'I can easily imagine such a place,' said Nora; 'and, though I do not exactly understand why you crawled over the stones—'

'To prevent them from rolling, and either alarming the deer or attracting the attention of those foresters, who are perpetually on the look-out.'

'Well,' said Nora, 'go on. You shot something, I suppose, or you would not have got into a dilemma? Tell me what happened.'

‘Oh, that was long after; and I rather expect you will enjoy, or at all events excuse, the scrape I have got into this time, as there is no harm done, and you can easily prevent any unpleasant consequences.’

‘Tell me how, and let me do it then,’ said Nora, impatiently.

‘I thought you would like to have a full and true account of all that occurred; besides, you cannot be of any use until to-morrow morning.’

‘In that case,’ said Nora, ‘you may be as circumstantial as you please; and while you relate, we can walk towards the inn together.’

‘By no means,’ cried Jack, catching her arm to detain her. ‘I do not wish to enter the village until it is dark, or the inn, until I can get to my own room, and wash my face without being observed: besides, for reasons which you will afterwards understand, I don’t choose any one to know that I have seen or spoken to you.’

‘This sounds very mysterious, Jack; I wish you would be more explicit.’

‘Well, don’t interrupt me so often,’ he rejoined; and then, having seated himself deliberately on a huge stone, he looked up with an air of extreme

satisfaction, and an odd twinkle in his eyes, and asked abruptly; 'Do you know what a *schmarn* is, Nora?'

'A sort of omelette, cut up into little pieces,' she answered.

'And a woodman's *schmarn*?' he asked.

'Something similar, I believe, excepting that it is made with water instead of milk.'

'Right: they call it *holz-muss*; and a better thing for keeping off hunger was never invented. That's what they gave me for supper yesterday evening.'

'Where?' asked Nora.

'At one of the houses—I don't know whether it was in Tyrol or Bavaria; very civil people they were—wanted to return me the greater part of the money I gave them.'

'Then you were probably in Bavaria,' observed Nora; 'but go on.'

'It was fortunate I had had so substantial a supper, and carried off a piece of rye-bread in my pocket, for, after we came to the "stand" they had talked so much about, the three Tyroleans left us, and we had to lie ensconced behind some rocks for hours and hours, listening to every



sound, distant and near, with fatiguing attention, and peering out continually, to see if we could distinguish anything approaching the green spot at the other side of the nearly dried up rivulet that ran between the mountains. I think it must have been a couple of hours past midnight, when we heard the sound of rolling stones and gravel, and soon after perceived a stray roebuck descending from the more barren heights to the grass plot nearly opposite us. I could see every movement; and at one time, as he raised his head, and came forward to the very edge of the grazing-place, he was not thirty yards from the muzzle of my rifle! I raised it—my hand was on the trigger—when,—can you believe it, Nora?—I got into such a state of agitation, that I could not attempt to take aim. I don't think I ever in my life had such a palpitation—such a fit of trembling—'

'And this is what you call sport!' said Nora.

'Pshaw!' he cried, starting up impatiently; 'there's no use in telling a woman anything of this kind, she can't understand one! In short, he moved about unconscious of his danger; gave me ample time to recover my self-possession; and—I

shot him. The row caused by the report of my rifle is not to be described ! Why just on that spot there should be such an infernal echo, I cannot tell. It may have sounded louder from the long silence that had preceded it—perhaps, also, my wish to do the thing quietly made me more observant of the noise—but it seemed as if a regular discharge of musketry had taken place, followed by a rolling, like thunder, along the mountain-side, apparently endless ; for, even as it gradually died away, a fresh report in the distance seemed to rouse the echo afresh, until I was perfectly aghast at the commotion I had caused.’

‘I suspect,’ observed Nora, ‘you are not the first wildschuetz who would have liked to silence the echoes about him : but stay !’ she added, hastily ; ‘you say this happened about two o’clock in the morning ?—now, Mr. Torp and Franz left Almenau at midnight, and must have been in the direction, and near enough to have heard your shot.’

‘To be sure they heard it,’ answered Jack, laughing ; ‘and I dare say did their best to get at us : but, in order to prevent an unnecessary encounter, while I was listening to the echo, Seppel had scrambled across the stream, to where the roe-

buck was lying, nearly motionless, only giving evidence of life by deep breathings and an occasional shiver, while enormous quantities of blood flowed from a wound in his side.'

'Poor thing!' said Nora, compassionately; 'I hope he did not suffer long.'

'Oh, no,' said Jack; 'his struggles were soon over; for Seppel plunged his hanger into the nape of his neck in a most scientific manner, and he never moved afterwards.'

'Well—well—and then?' said Nora.

'And then,' continued Jack, 'he butchered away for some time in a manner that I need not describe to you, and ended by placing the roebuck partly in his green linen bag, and slinging it, with my assistance, on his back. He afterwards put his fingers between his teeth, and produced a succession of piercing whistling sounds.'

'What for?' asked Nora.

'A signal to the other fellows to join us: they had been searching about the rocks above us, as I had promised them something if I got a shot. Seppel said it was better to be satisfied with the roebuck for this time, and proposed going on to the alp, as he believed the forester was out on the

mountain, and he was the last person he wished to meet just then.'

'What a passion this hunting must be,' soliloquised Nora; 'not to be able to resist the temptation even now, when so much is at stake!'

'You may well say that,' observed John; 'for if the old man had seen us, we should have had bullets "whistling as they went for want of thought." They tell me he fires in a very unceremonious manner at every wildschuetz he meets, ever since his eldest son was shot by one somewhere about here.'

'The forester was, fortunately, at home last night,' began Nora; 'but his son and Mr. Torp—'

'I know, I know,' cried John, interrupting her; 'they came upon us at the Wild Alp, just as we had made a fire, and were going to cook our breakfast. One of our Tyroleans was on the watch; and, as we were five to two, we let them come on, and prepared for battle.'

Nora looked alarmed, but John's laugh reassured her, and she let him continue without interruption.

'Our sentinel gave the alarm; we seized our rifles, and looked through the window, just in time

to see the enemy advancing up the hill, and over the ground tramped into holes by the cattle in wet weather. Torp and his companion sprang behind some rocks, raised their rifles, and shouted to the Tyroleans, who appeared at the door, to deliver up their arms. They were answered by an order to sheer off, if they thought their lives worth preserving. Seppel, in the meantime, kept in the back-ground with me; and I am much mistaken if Torp, supposing us to be but three, did not consider himself, with the assistant forester, more than a match for us! At all events he showed more courage than prudence, for no sooner had the Tyroleans retreated into the hut, than he left his place of safety, and rushed after them, notwithstanding the loud remonstrances of his companion, who, nevertheless, seemed to think himself obliged to follow him. You should have seen how Seppel pounced upon the young forester—'

'What!' exclaimed Nora; 'surely you must be mistaken!'

'Not a bit,' cried Jack: 'he knocked his rifle out of his hand, and then they wrestled desperately for a few seconds; but, with the assistance of one of the Tyroleans, he managed to get him down

on the ground, and then tied his hands behind his back, and afterwards his feet together.'

'And Mr. Torp?' asked Nora.

'Torp floored the two fellows who attacked him without any difficulty, and was evidently making for the door, with his eye on his rifle, until I rushed to the rescue; and though I determined not to betray myself by speaking, and didn't say, "Come on," I'm afraid I looked it, for he turned to me at once, and we had a regular set-to, pitching into each other like—'

'Jack, Jack,' cried Nora quickly, 'you have betrayed yourself to Mr. Torp, and will be completely in his power.'

'You could not expect me to wait until he knocked me down, too!' cried Jack; 'I gave him fair play afterwards, at all events, for as soon as the others attacked him again, I drew off. I tell you, Nora, you would have died of laughing had you seen him, as I did, struggling on the floor, and giving them all employment before he was pinioned. He's an uncommonly powerful fellow, that Torp!'

'Perhaps,' said Nora, 'he did not observe any difference in your mode of attack from that of the

others, for, after all, his surprise and the confusion must have been too great for him to make nice observations.'

'I don't know,' replied Jack, carelessly, 'I kept out of his way as much as I could from the time he was overpowered by numbers. The young forester kicked, and writhed, and raged, vowing vengeance on us all: Torp never moved from the time that resistance was useless, and actually contrived to look dignified when lying helpless on the ground, fixing his great grey eyes upon us one after another with such scrutinizing glances that we thought it expedient to get him out of the way, and had him carried into the little inner room and laid on the boards that had served as bedstead to the shepherdess---I mean dairy-maid, that is what they call *sennerin*.'

'And did he not speak a word then?' asked Nora.

'He said that he hoped we would send some one up to release them before they were starved to death; but Seppel answered that he was not such a fool as to run the risk of having his messenger brought before the judge of the district to betray us. Torp then proposed terms, said that he would take no steps to discover us, and if we would release him

at once he would even promise to remain three or four hours in the hut in order to give us time to get into Tyrol; but Seppel did not understand such chivalry, laughed in his face, and locked the door of the room.'

'Good heavens, what a dreadful situation!' cried Nora; 'surely, Jack, you interfered at last?'

'Not I,' he said, with a laugh; 'they would not hear of the young forester's being set at liberty, and I could not help enjoying Torp's discomfiture, after all his incivility to me. Of course I thought all the while of telling you, and proposing your making an excursion to the alp to-morrow, with one of your numerous peasant friends. You know you can be quite astonished at finding them prisoners, and all that sort of thing. Take plenty of prog with you, for they'll be deucedly hungry, I suspect, by the time you reach them.'

'I wish I could go this moment,' said Nora, uneasily, 'it is horrible to think of their passing the night in such a way!'

'Why didn't Torp let me have my sport by fair means?' said John; 'if I can only have it by stealth he shall not interfere with me. You know you have often said he was a selfish, disagreeable



man, Nora, and a little punishment of this kind may bring down his pride perhaps. At all events such things are not uncommon hereabouts, and as to their being starved, or anything of that kind, there is no danger whatever, for if the old forester did not go to look for them he could be sent an anonymous letter you know. The simplest of all plans, however, will be for you to go to the alp; Torp knows that you are continually making excursions of the kind, and—'

'And,' interposed Nora, 'and fortunately he has heard me say that I intended to go to this very place.'

'Then go,' cried John eagerly, 'go, and get up a loud scream when you see him—afterwards you can laugh and question him as much as you like.'

'I have only to leave Rosel in ignorance of all that has occurred,' said Nora, 'and she will be astonished and shocked enough for us both. And now, Jack, I must leave you to make arrangements with her, and put off my uncle and Georgina, who had at last consented to go to one of the lower alps near the village. The man who was to have been our guide must be told to call for me at three o'clock in the morning instead of eight, and I shall

take all the provisions provided for my uncle to your prisoners.'

'I say, Nora,' cried John, calling after her as she descended to the road, 'don't betray me by lookin' conscious when you see Torp, and avoid answering any questions he may ask you.'

Rosel was not much surprised at Nora's change of plan : the excuse was so plausible, that she must take advantage of the fine weather to go to the Wild Alp, as every one said that the path after rain would be impracticable for her, and a continuance of the present warm weather was not to be expected.

And Rosel explained this at some length, not only at the inn, but also when she went afterwards with a pair of Nora's boots to the shoemaker and requested him, late as it was, to put large nails in the soles, as otherwise her young lady would find it hard to get over the rocks and loose stones on the way down the mountain from the Wild Alp.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE WILD ALP.

DAY had not dawned, but the moon, though completely screened by the mountains, still afforded a pale grey sort of light as Nora, accompanied by Rosel and an athletic young wood-cleaver named Michael, left the forester's house. Their way was at first through meadows and gently sloping hills, and woods of beech and maple, past isolated peasants' houses where, early as it was, the thrashing-flail was already being swung by busy hands. Many were the morning greetings that Nora and her companions received as they passed the open barn doors, and great the surprise expressed when it was known that they were on their way to the Wild Alp, where the huts were uninhabited and the cattle driven home for the winter ! Higher up Nora observed fields of corn and wheat scarcely ready for the

sickle, and oats still green as grass. By degrees the beech, birch, and maple trees became rarer, and they entered a forest of pine and fir that Nora thought endless, and, in fact, it covered a not inconsiderable mountain, over which they had to pass before they reached the one on which the Wild Alp was situated.

The mountains around Almenau joined those of Tyrol, and not unfrequently the line of boundary between Bavaria and Austria was made evident by a clearance of wood about the width of a road, which might be distinguished for miles through the forest district, seemingly made with as little regard to hill or dale as a line drawn on a map. Nora had been out some hours, and the sun had risen before she arrived at those higher regions whence she could observe this and look down on the chains of wooded mountains beneath, with their intersecting valleys and winding rivers; then, too, she caught the first glimpse of the long row of glaciers that so deeply interest the Highland tourist, each step rendering visible a greater extent of eternal snow and ice. More and more rugged became her path, while rocks of the most grotesque form seemed to start

from the ground in all directions, and as they wound round the mountain on a narrow shelf that had been blasted in the rocks for the convenience of charcoal-burners and cattle, Nora stopped for a few minutes to look down a deep dry water-course, and wonder at the havoc caused by a small waterfall that now, trickling scantily from the heights above, seemed in no way to render necessary the bridge of felled trees over which she stepped ; but which in spring or after rain probably swelled to a raging cataract, as it had prostrated trees and carried away everything impeding its course down the mountain. Masses of loose stones, gravel, and sand, forced along by the torrent, had not remained in the bed excavated by the water, but, spreading over a wide space of ground at each side, had created a scene of devastation that widened as it proceeded until finally lost in the chaos of rocks that vainly opposed the progress of a river far below in the gorge between the mountains.

When Nora turned from this spot and began to pursue her path, she perceived Rosel far above her, kneeling beside a wooden cross that had been placed in a sheltered nook beneath ledge

of rock; the sun's first glowing rays fell on it and the bent figure, and as Nora approached she perceived a tablet containing a picture fastened to the cross, and knew that on the spot where it stood some one had died suddenly, by accident or otherwise. When Rosel stood up, Nora bent forward and saw a very rough representation of a man with a blackened face, intended to represent a wildschuetz, but which might also have been the portrait of a fiend incarnate, as from an ambush he fired at a young man whose trim uniform showed him to be a hunter and wood-ranger by profession.

‘Your eldest brother, I suppose?’ said Nora.

‘Yes. My father, who heard the report of the rifle at the alp, ran on here and found him shot through the heart.’

‘And the wildschuetz?’ asked Nora.

‘He escaped by sliding down the mountain on the sand, near the waterfall, at the place you were standing just now, and once in the forest below, there was no chance of finding him. My mother had this picture painted by Florian's father and put up here; but I sometimes think it would be better if she had been satisfied

with the churchyard cross, for every time my father comes on this mountain, he vows fresh vengeance against every wildschuetz he may hereafter meet. When he is hunting or inspecting the woods about here, I can never sleep at night, and was right glad that he stayed at home, and sent out Franz with the Englishman yesterday.'

'You feared, perhaps, that Seppel once out on the mountain, might be tempted to—'

'Oh no, I did not think of him,' said Rosel; 'you know he has gone to invite his people to our betrothal.'

'And this is not the way to the Kerbstein lake,' said Nora.

'Not—the—shortest,' answered Rosel, with some hesitation; 'yet not much out of the way either; but I can trust Seppel now, and even if he did pass by the alp, it would be with no unlawful intention.'

Nora walked on in silence, so occupied with her thoughts that she took but little notice of the surrounding scenery, until startled by a loud shout from their guide, then she perceived that they had reached the base of the walls of rock that formed the summit of the mountain, while

beneath her, with its deserted châteaux and rock-bound nameless lake, lay the Wild Alp. There was a gloomy grandeur in the scene that Nora had not expected; no tree or shrub grew on the steep shore of the emerald green lake, in the wonderfully clear waters of which every cleft in the surrounding rocks was reflected; no rivulet poured itself into the tranquil basin, nor was there any apparent outlet for the water—supplied by hidden springs; equally secret channels conveyed the superfluous water through the adjoining mountains, leaving the lake in unruffled serenity, and rendering distinctly visible the sand, stones, rocks, and plants that afforded refuge to shoals of large and thriving fish.

Nora descended to the lake, clambered along the pathless shore, until she reached the deserted hut of a charcoal-burner, and there remained while her companions went on to the châteaux, which were at some distance, on a rising ground. She heard Michael's gay jodel long after he was out of sight, then a pause, followed at intervals by shouts of four or five notes in a descending scale, leaving time between them for an answer, after which all was still.



Had the prisoners called for help, and been able to make themselves heard? Nora thought so, and began slowly to mount the cow path, now dry and hard, but perfectly answering the description given her by Waldemar of the places called cows' stockings; she soon, however, found a way to the short green grass of the alp, and, by a slightly circuitous path, was enabled to ascertain that the door of the nearest *châlet* was open.

Let not the reader suppose that the word *châlet* is here used to designate a building such as is known in England by this name, or that of Swiss cottage; the common appellation in Tyrol and Bavaria for these dwellings is *Senner* hut, —*senner* (herd and dairy-man), being usual in the former, and *Sennerin* (herds and dairy-maid) almost universal in the latter. Perhaps the proper word in English is cowherd's cot; but these words would scarcely give a correct idea of the picturesque summer residences of the Bavarian highland herds-woman. The small gable front, with its door and window at each side, is of stone and whitewashed; the loft above is of wood, as also the long adjoining cow-house; and

all are under the same low overhanging roof of shingles, kept steady by stones of dimensions calculated to defy the storms that rage round the exposed place in winter. Generally a wide extent of the greenest pasturage surrounds these sennet huts: on the Wild Alp the herbage seemed to have sprung up among rocks; it was short, thick, and to the eye of the botanist presented a vegetation quite different from that of the plains, or even the valleys at the base of the mountains. No garden or glass-house can furnish more beautiful plants than are here to be found forcing their way through moss, or the clefts in the rocks, creeping round the decayed roots of trees, or luxuriating in the damp atmosphere of some ever-flowing spring. Nora clambered up among the rocks, and had gathered a handful of these wonderfully delicate flowers, when Rosel suddenly appeared at the door of the hut, with raised arms, called loudly to her, and then, with both hands pressed to her forehead, rushed impetuously down the slope, before Nora had time to descend from her elevated position.

The poor girl's passionate vehemence was so great, that her relation of what had occurred

would have been perfectly unintelligible to Nora had she not previously been so well informed. She was still standing on a fragment of rock, as Rosel ended her recital by a burst of tears, and the not unexpected information that her brother Franz had recognised Seppel among the wild hunters, and had vowed he would have him prosecuted, if only to prevent his sister from marrying an incorrigible wildschuetz, who would bring disgrace on them hereafter, and being in league with the Tyroleans, might, for all they could tell, have been the accomplice, if not himself the villain who had shot their brother Philip.

‘As if,’—she sobbed, ‘as if Seppel would ever have entered our house, or spoken a word to me, after committing such a crime!’

‘Don’t make yourself unhappy about so preposterous an accusation,’ said Nora, consolingly; ‘your brother spoke in anger, and does not, I am sure, entertain the slightest suspicion of the kind. That Seppel was one of the wild hunters is possible—is probable—and we must endeavour to accommodate matters as well as we can, and persuade Franz to forgive—’

‘ Oh, he won’t forgive,’ cried Rosel, interrupting her, ‘ I know he won’t—for he says that Seppel singled him out, and rushed upon him with a fury that was perfectly incomprehensible.’

‘ But,’ said Nora, thoughtfully, as they walked towards the hut together, ‘ but he cannot prove that it was Seppel, for I suppose he took the usual precaution of disguising himself?’

‘ His face was blackened,’ answered Rosel, ‘ but Franz said he could not be mistaken in the tall figure, and thick black hair, and large white teeth, and he is ready to swear that it was Seppel and no other.’

‘ He had better not,’ rejoined Nora, ‘ for Seppel may be able to prove that he was at the Kerbstein lake with his relations when your brother was taken prisoner. What did Mr. Torp say?’

‘ The Englishman!’ exclaimed Rosel, confused, ‘ I don’t know, I did not see him, I never thought of him. Michael helped me to cut the cords that bound Franz, who was so fierce and wild that he quite frightened me, and put everything else out of my head.’

She had not quite finished speaking, when her brother suddenly appeared before the hut, and

directly afterwards darted past them, with a velocity that rendered all attempts to arrest his progress ineffectual. Where the ground had been rendered rough and uneven by the cattle, he stopped, bent down, appeared to rub his ankles in an impatient, hasty manner, and then moved on with a very perceptible limp. Rosel started forward—turned round—spoke a few agitated, scarcely intelligible words to Nora about the necessity of following her brother—rushed after him without waiting for an answer, and a few seconds afterwards they disappeared together behind the rocks.

At the door of the hut stood Torp and Michael, not a trace of displeasure on the face of the stoical Englishman. Nora bowed slightly, sat down on the bench outside the house, and leaned back against the wall, as if determined to rest after her fatiguing walk.

Now though Mr. Torp chose to be haughty and repulsive to every member of the Nixon family, he could be very much the contrary with other people, and Nora found him talking in the most unaffectedly familiar manner to her guide.

‘I believe after all,’ he said, glancing downwards at his feet, ‘that I was quite as firmly bound as Franz, but my boots saved my ankles, and by remaining quiet I spared my wrists. All things considered they behaved well enough, brought me my cigars that had dropped out of my pocket during the scuffle, and told me I should find my rifle in the cellar.’

‘And,’ said Michael, in a confidential tone, ‘and do you too think that long Seppel from the Craggs was one of them?’

‘If you mean the tall cuirassier, with the black hair,’ replied Torp, ‘I think he was.’

‘No wonder the forester’s Rosel took on so,’ observed Michael.

‘She seems a good girl,’ said Torp, ‘and did all she could to pacify her brother,—at least as well as I could hear what they said from the inner room, for Franz quite forgot me in the first burst of his wrath.’

‘He had cause enough for his anger,’ observed Michael, ‘if so be that Seppel did indeed single him out, and fall upon him at once with all the signs of the bitterest enmity.’

‘I was too busily engaged myself, to observe

what happened to Franz,' answered Torp; 'but I dare say his sister will make him pardon this affront, for after all it is little else.'

'She may follow him all the way home, and go down on her knees to him, and he will not pardon this insult,' said Michael. 'I heard him tell her that he could have excused the attack under the circumstances, knowing how much Seppel had at stake; and had he only been overpowered by numbers and made prisoner, why it was not more than might happen to any one; but that as long as he lived he never would forgive or forget Seppel's coming back to the hut after the others were gone, standing grinning at him when he lay helpless on the floor, and then brutally spurning and kicking him, as if he had been a cur or reptile that he longed to destroy.'

'Impossible! he never could have acted so!' cried Nora, starting from her listless posture, and looking up with an expression of so much surprise and concern that Torp opened his eyes wide in wonder at the interest so openly avowed by his countrywoman for a notorious wildschuetz.

'These were the assistant forester's own words'

to his sister,' said Michael, 'and grief enough they caused her.'

'He must have been out of his senses, unconscious of what he was doing,' began Nora.

'Well,' said Michael, 'it's not unlikely that he did take a glass too much of Tyrolean wine. We are more used to beer than wine in Bavaria, and it may have got into *his* head, though the others did not feel it. The son-in-law of the sexton at St. Hubert's, who lives at the other side of the frontiers, has good wine, I am told, for his friends, and the gentleman here says there were four from Tyrol with Seppel.'

'*Three*,' interposed Torp, with strong emphasis, 'the fourth was certainly not a Tyrolean.'

'One of the boys from our village?' asked Michael.

'I think it very likely that he came from Almenau,' answered Torp, his eye resting on Nora, while he spoke with so much meaning that she perceived he already began to suspect that she had been sent to release him.

The interest excited in her mind by the recent occurrence was, however, on Rosel's account, too great to allow her to think of herself, or even



John, at that moment ; she therefore looked up without embarrassment, and observed, ‘It is so much more likely that Seppel would endeavour to keep in the background, and avoid being seen on this occasion, that I am inclined to think that Franz, after the first attack, may have mistaken one of the Tyroleans for him. He did not speak, of course?’

‘A few words to me,’ said Torp ; ‘but I do not know his voice.’

‘Well,’ said Michael, after a pause, ‘I wonder if they will be able to prove anything against him this time. Often and often has he been brought before the judge, but was always dismissed for want of sufficient evidence against him. If he can contrive to mystify them all this time, why he has the devil’s own luck, and they may as well let him alone in future.’

‘Yet,’ observed Nora, ‘the accusation will, I fear, be sufficient to injure his prospects materially. The forester may refuse to give him his daughter, and even Rosel herself—’

‘Oh ! as to Rosel,’ said Michael, winking knowingly to Torp, ‘that will make no difference to her, she likes him all the better for being a scape-

grace. It's the way with the girls about here, the wilder a fellow is the more they like him.'

Torp looked amused, and Michael continued: 'Seppel's what they call here a fresh boy, "a frisher," who never tapped at a window that it was not opened, who never turned into an alp but that the best milk and butter was not set before him; and certain it is that no sennerin could ever be made to remember having seen him hunting, or even carrying a rifle.'

'You are speaking of many years ago,' said Nora, 'for since he has been in the army no young man could be steadier.'

'He was a cuirassier in the year forty-eight, and took his pleasure on the mountains here as well as any—of us.'

'In that year there was no law to prevent the peasants from hunting,' observed Nora.

'And a pretty mess they made of it,' interposed Torp.

'It was about that time,' said Michael, 'that I was engaged by the forester as one of the charcoal-burners at the clearance above the Trift Alp, part of which belongs to the miller, whose

handsome daughter was there that year as *sennerin*.'

'I was not aware,' observed Torp, 'that the peasants sent their daughters on the alps as *sennerins*.'

'Often enough about here,' answered Michael. 'If they go with free will and for pleasure, as many of them do, they call it their "*sommer frish*," and fresh enough the *sennerins* were that same year. The Trift Alp is on the frontiers, half Tyrolean, half Bavarian; the miller's Madeleine was there, and Afra, a smith's daughter from Tyrol, that some said was even handsomer. At all events a more frolicsome pair were never seen, and the talk of their beauty was so great that the boys came from far and wide to see them, and none more often than Sepp from the Crag.'

'High and low, all—all the same,' soliloquized Nora. 'He had pledged his troth to Rosel that very year!'

'We found out afterwards,' continued Michael, with a laugh, 'that he was all the while out after a chamois that was hovering about the frontier.'

'Oh, I'm glad to hear that,' she said, quickly.

Torp smiled and looked towards her, but she did not observe him.

‘And didn’t we tease the girls afterwards about him,’ continued Michael, ‘and didn’t Madeleine chafe and fume at his hypocrisy, as she called it; and the very next time he tapped at her window only opened it to call him a scamp, and then banged it to with such force that every pane of glass was smashed to atoms!’

Torp and Nora laughed simultaneously. ‘And what did Seppel do then?’ she asked.

‘He went on to Afra’s, but she neither opened window nor door, and only answered his call by wishing him a pleasant hunt.’

‘And then?’ asked Nora.

‘He ate his schmarn at old Nandls, and shared her coffee, and made light of the girls’ anger, and said he’d send a lad to Madeleine to mend the window; and sure enough the next day up came Black Seppel from the mill, and was well received, though as dull and dismal a fellow as could be found, even in his country.’

‘I never heard that the Tyroleans were dull and dismal,’ observed Torp.

‘An earnest people, or at least very little given to cheerfulness, we consider them at this side of the mountains,’ said Michael; ‘and the more south you go the less you hear of singing and dancing, until at last both seem forgotten, and a wedding is about as gay as a funeral.’

‘I believe they avoid all unnecessary revelry from religious motives,’ began Torp, ‘and are, perhaps, somewhat fanatical—’

‘Eh? what’s that?’ asked Michael.

‘I mean their religion is of rather a gloomy description, but they are an interesting people; the women handsome, the men courageous, and the best marksmen I ever met; not even the Swiss can surpass them in the handling of a rifle.’

‘Well, I don’t think we’re behind hand in that way in Bavaria,’ said Michael. ‘I could name a good many in Almenau who have brought home prizes from Tyrol. No one can deny that they are steady marksmen at the other side of the mountains, but they are tardy in taking aim. Slow and sure is their motto, and when a Tyrolean is in the shooting-stand he is in no hurry to leave it. At a target we fire five shots to their three.’

‘Of course,’ said Torp, ‘there is a good deal of rivalry between the two countries on this subject?’

‘No doubt of it,’ answered Michael, laughing, ‘and about other matters too.’

‘Which,’ said Torp, ‘causes occasional skirmishing at the inns most probably.’

‘Often enough formerly,’ answered Michael; ‘but we can get up a row without the Tyroleans, and require small provocation to take up the cudgels and lay about us. I’ve got into trouble myself for a trifle.’

‘And,’ said Nora, ‘besides the wounds given and received in these battles, accidents with fire-arms must be of quite common occurrence here. How can it be otherwise, with guns in every house, and boys longing to use them, after hearing men boasting continually of their prowess out hunting or at target-shooting matches.’

‘Yet I don’t remember any accident ever happening in our neighbourhood,’ said Michael, ‘excepting Black Seppel’s, and that was in Tyrol.’

‘What happened to him?’ asked Nora.

‘One day, about seven years ago, when he was trying a new rifle behind his father’s mill,

his younger brother came springing towards him unawares, and received a wound in his neck that caused him to bleed to death. Seppel left home, it is supposed, for this reason, and entered into service at our miller's, where he has been ever since, and remains, they say, for love of the miller's daughter. At all events, he has never since touched a rifle, goes out of the way whenever there is a shooting-match, and I shouldn't like to be the man to ask him why he dislikes the smell of powder.'

'I wish he would go back to Tyrol,' said Nora; 'he is exceedingly in the way just now, and Madeleine does not care for him in the least.'

'Doesn't she?' cried Michael. 'I've heard her say often enough that she liked him, and why she liked him.'

'You seem to know her well,' observed Nora.

'Are we not from the same village?' asked Michael, 'and is not that next to being of the same family? She liked Black Seppel just because he was disliked by everybody else, and especially because he was morose to all the world but herself.'

‘And who is this Madeleine?’ asked Torp, with some curiosity.

‘The mountain miller’s daughter,’ answered Nora, rising; ‘and I am afraid I must add as perfect a coquette as you could find in any London or Paris ball-room.’

‘Stay, Miss Nixon,’ cried Torp, perceiving her about to leave them, ‘or at least before you go have the charity to give me some of the provisions that are so temptingly protruding from your guide’s green bag.’

‘I ought to have thought of that before,’ said Nora, turning into the hut, ‘and poor Franz has gone off hungry in all probability!’

‘Franz filled his pockets with bread before he left us,’ said Torp; ‘and I confess to having stolen a couple of sandwiches, for after having fasted upwards of four-and-twenty hours, the temptation was more than I could resist. I cannot remember ever being so hungry—so ravenously hungry—as at this moment,’ he added, seating himself on the low hearth, and beginning to eat with so apparent an appetite that Nora continued laughingly for some time to supply him, altogether forgetful of herself or her guide.



‘What a profusion of provisions!’ he remarked, at last, when she had spread the whole contents of the bag before him. ‘Quite a banquet for an alp party!’ and as his eyes rested on a bottle of wine, and a couple of small tumblers, he added, ‘One might almost suppose you had had a sort of presentiment, Miss Nixon, that half-famished prisoners would require your good offices!’

Nora saw a provokingly meaning smile playing round his lips, and the eyes that had disconcerted Jack and his companions by their scrutinizing glances seemed very much inclined to try their power on her.

‘When I desired Rosel to pack up these things,’ she answered, quietly, ‘neither you nor your companion were in my thoughts I can assure you. We intended to have made a family party to one of the lower alps near the village, and the wine especially was intended for—’ she stopped, not choosing to betray herself by saying the word ‘uncle.’

‘For the old gentleman who fishes at St. Benedict’s,’ interposed Michael, as distinctly as his crammed mouth would permit him to articulate.

‘Exactly,’ said Nora.

‘And you changed your plan—aw—suddenly—perhaps yesterday evening?’ persisted Torp.

‘You may remember having heard your friend M. Waldemar recommend me to visit this alp before a change of weather made it inaccessible,’ she answered, ‘and fortunately for you I have followed his advice.’

‘Change of weather,’ he repeated, ‘not much chance of that I should think.’

‘I would not take upon me to answer for this evening,’ observed Michael, glancing towards the open door, ‘those light streaky clouds denote storm.’

‘Perhaps we had better leave the alp at once,’ proposed Nora, hastily; ‘I confess I should not like to be weather-bound here.’

‘We have had clouds like these continually during the last fortnight,’ said Torp, ‘and you will be dreadfully tired, Miss Nixon, if you do not rest after your fatiguing walk before you attempt the not easy descent of this mountain.’

Nora said she could rest more pleasantly at the shore of the lake than in the hut, and left them, rather glad on any pretence to escape the further questionings of Torp.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE FORESTER'S BRIDGE.

TORP would have been little flattered had he known with what extreme satisfaction Nora left him to the society of her guide. It had become quite evident to her that he suspected Jack of having assisted in taking him prisoner; and though his wish to obtain some certainty on the subject was natural enough, his quiet attempts to embarrass her had been to say, the least, disagreeable, as she felt very doubtful as to the use he might make of any proof of Jack's guilt, or her connivance, that he might be able to procure. Had Waldemar been in his place, she would without hesitation have told him all she knew of the vexatious affair, and would have requested his good offices for Seppel, and complete forgiveness of Jack's share in the exploit, almost with the certainty that neither would be refused her. Torp's cool self-possession repelled confidence, and her

experience led her to consider him a hard, worldly-minded man, who would undoubtedly call a wildschuetz a poacher, and let the law take its course. Her best plan, then, was to avoid him ; and as she thought it was probable that the little lake would have more interest for him than any other spot in the neighbourhood of the hut, and might tempt him out even in the noontide heat, she turned her steps in a contrary direction, mounted the rising ground behind the huts, and soon reached the base of the chain of rocks that gave the alp itself the wild appearance whence it derived its name.

Among these rocks, Nora climbed with unre-  
laxing perseverance, until she came to a height from which she could see a great part of the Bavarian Highlands, and far into Tyrol: then seating herself in a sheltered spot, she overlooked at her leisure a world of hill and dale, forest and rocks,—the last named in such masses, and of such wild and fantastic forms, that they must have surprised even those accustomed to such scenes. Mountain on mountain rose innumerable, some rounded, some conical, others long ridged, but almost all with high rocky sum-

mits occasionally starting abruptly out of the pine-forest, but more frequently allowing the eye to follow the gradual cessation of vegetation, until the bare stone rose sharply against the blue sky. No stretch of the imagination was required to discover what appeared the ruins of gigantic strongholds or watch-towers: it was rather necessary to call reason to assist the sight, in order to be convinced that the hands of men could never have constructed buildings of such proportions in such places. To an English observer the most striking objects in the view would have been the immense extent of forest, the ultramarine blue of the distant heights, and the long region of eternal snow and ice beyond. For Nora, these objects possessed *not* the charm of novelty, but the far—far more deeply felt attraction of strong resemblance to similar scenes indelibly impressed on her memory, and treasured in her heart of hearts for ten long years,—serving as solace in hours of London solitude, when the chimneys of the neighbouring houses, and the dusky sky above them, had wearied her eyes and dulled her senses.

That part of Nora's life was now in its turn

beginning to appear like a dream—its monotony giving the delusion plausibility, so that the events of a decennium dwindled easily into the recollections of half an hour, while previous years expanded, and bright visions of childhood and early youth flitted before her. Half reclining on the small patch of moss that she had chosen as resting-place, hours might have passed, and in fact did pass unobserved by her. The sun was high in the heavens,—the rocks no longer afforded any shade, but rather seemed to attract his beams, causing a feeling of intolerable heat, —the fresh current of air that scarcely ever fails on the alps was replaced by an oppressive calm, —when Nora, at length, started from her recumbent posture, and sat upright, her hands clasped round her knees as she gazed intently about her. Had she been sleeping? dreaming? She could not think so,—for those fields of snow had not been lost sight of, but had rather given rise to a long train of recollections ending at the Gross Venediger, on which she now looked. Years ago, when travelling through the valley of Pinzgan, she had passed a night at Mittersill, near that glacier, and had first seen it with the

gorgeous background of a summer evening sky. When they had arrived at the inn, every one had been occupied with preparations for the ensuing day, on which the *primitz* of a young priest was to take place. They called it his *primitz*, that is, *prima missa*,—first time of reading mass; and as he was the son of a peasant in the neighbourhood, he had chosen the inn at Mittersill for the celebration of the fête usual on such occasions. The guest—chamber and staircase had been decorated with green wreaths, a room near the kitchen contained a row of tables covered with dishes full of flour, eggs, sweetmeats, pounded sugar, and other ingredients, that only awaited the dexterous hand of the cook to change their nature and their name. As if it were but yesterday, Nora remembered having entreated her mother to allow her to be present the next morning at the ceremony in the church, and the landlady's good-natured offer to take charge of her. 'My little daughter Marie,' she said, 'is to be his reverence's bride. He knew what he was about when he chose her, for, of course, I shall do something handsome towards his future house-keeping, to say nothing of my husband, who is

his cousin.' Nora's father and mother had talked much during the evening of the custom of celebrating the *primitz* of a priest as if it were a marriage, of the useful presents given by the parents of the brides, and much more that she had not understood; but in the morning 'his reverence's bride' had come to waken her, and greatly had she admired the demure, rosy-cheeked little girl, scarcely seven years old, and her fresh muslin frock and wreath of white flowers placed like a coronet on her head. The procession to the church had been long and pompous, the crowd there dense, and universal and deep the devotion pictured in the faces upturned, or the heads bowed reverently to receive the blessing of the agitated young man, who, with raised arms and flushed cheeks, looked down from the pulpit on a congregation above whom his recent vows had placed him so immeasurably high. As the crowd dispersed, Nora's attention had been directed towards the glacier by hearing some peasants observe that the 'Venediger,' was putting on his cap, and they might expect a change of weather before long—and as it had then appeared to her so it was now. A light mist



seemed to hover about the summit, rendering the outline indistinct, and spreading along the snow fields in a shadowy manner, that made it difficult to decide whether the vapour rose from the snow or was drawn downwards towards it. The more distant glaciers were soon lost to sight, and, as if at a given signal, clouds gathered round most of the adjacent peaks, and higher mountain ridges. All this was at first so distant—so far away in Tyrol—that Nora watched the lights and shadows, and the changes produced in the scenery with delight and interest, undisturbed by a thought of her own position, until some long light clouds began to rest on the summits in her immediate vicinity, and wreaths of white transparent vapour rose from, and hovered over the wooded acclivities. Then she commenced a quick descent of the rocks, and met her guide, who said that he and the English gentleman had been looking for her at the lake, and that they had not a moment to lose, if they hoped to get partly down the mountain before the storm commenced.

‘Perhaps,’ said Torp, who was standing with folded arms on a prominent crag, and looking

along the horizon with such engrossing attention that he did not even turn round while speaking, 'Perhaps it would be better to await the storm here, Michael; it seems to me nearer than you supposed; and Miss Nixon will scarcely be able to reach in time the shelter of the first houses on the mountain, though we might manage it by making a violent exertion.'

'I am a very good walker,' said Nora, rather alarmed at the prospect of spending the night in the hut.

'The alp is greatly exposed,' observed Michael, 'and in a few hours may be covered with snow. If the sennerins were still here the young lady might stop in the hut for a day or two pleasantly enough; but without provisions we could not attempt it now. The rain that's coming will be no summer shower, I can tell you; and what with the bare rocks on this side, and the waterfall across the way on the other, and the river flooded below, it might be long before any one could reach us, or we make our way down the mountain with the young lady, though she did climb it as well as the queen herself could have done!'

Nora smiled, and observed that climbing a mountain like a queen was very dubious praise.

‘Not in Bavaria, Miss Nixon,’ said Torp, ‘as Michael would explain to you at some length, if we had time to listen to him.’

‘Then,’ said Nora, ‘having heard that I mounted so well, you will scarcely doubt my being able to descend also, and if we hurry forward, perhaps we may reach the peasant’s house, where the corn was still green.’

‘Let us try at least to get past the waterfall before the rain comes down upon us,’ exclaimed Michael, springing on to the hut.

He reappeared with Torp’s rifle slung over his shoulder, and busily employed burying in the recesses of his green pouch the small remains of their recent repast.

A few minutes afterwards they were on their way to the lake, which Nora scarcely looked at in her eagerness to leave the valley of the alp and reach a more elevated spot, where she could better judge of the state of the weather, and see the approach of the storm.

‘This is really a magnificent sight!’ cried Torp, soon after, warmed into a sort of enthusiasm, as once more the long range of mountains became visible.

‘What a change,’ said Nora, contrasting in her mind the blue sky, cloudless mountains, and sunny valleys that she had seen from the same place but a few hours previously; ‘what a complete change of scene! One might almost expect to see Woatin himself appear among that chaos of clouds.’

‘You mean the wild huntsman, miss,’ said Michael; ‘people say he is out regular in the thunder-storms at the change of the season, and this may be the last summer storm. I suppose,’—he added, half-interrogatively—‘I suppose it’s the queer-shaped clouds that give rise to the saying about the wild hunt?’

‘Not exactly,’ answered Nora; ‘Woatin was, I believe, supposed to be the god of thunder, and has in some way been confused with the wild huntsman. I wish whichever brings the last summer storm, would at least delay his appearance until we were safely down the mountain.’

‘And I,’ said Torp, ‘wish I could remain

here and watch the coming of this storm, which is the very grandest thing I ever saw in my life.'

'Are you deterred from remaining on account of the waterfall?' asked Nora. 'I am quite sure the danger has been exaggerated, for it would require hours of rain to produce a flood that would fill the space beneath the wooden bridge I passed over on my way here.'

'You are not aware,' answered Torp, 'that the water has been kept back for the woodfall. A few days ago Franz showed me the place that had been dammed up, and the felled wood piled up beneath it. The reservoir was at that time nearly full of water, and he said a few hours' rain such as might be expected after this sultry weather would burst the temporary sluice, and save him the trouble of sending up men to hew it down.'

'I thought,' said Nora, 'that most of the timber about here was sledged down the mountain in winter.'

'Water carriage is always the cheapest,' answered Torp; 'enormous quantities can be conveyed, without either expense or trouble, down the mountain with the fall of the water; and

once in the river below us, it will work its way to the neighbourhood of Almenau, where a grating across the stream stops its further progress, unless it be considered desirable to give it free passage to another place.'

While they were speaking, a thick white cloud began to wreath itself round the mountain on which they stood, its motion scarcely perceptible as it rolled along, avoiding the bright sunbeams that still lingered on the summit. As the heavens above lowered, valley after valley darkened into deepest shade, a struggling ray of light resting last of all but for a moment on the white steeple of a secluded pilgrimage chapel that had failed to attract the eye in brighter hours. Torp and Nora watched with intense interest the last array of clouds that, rushing across the sky, at length effectually obscured the sun's disk, and caused an indescribable gloom to fall on all around them. Distant lightnings darted through the leaden-hued firmament, and in the direction of the Wild Alp a long stripe of green coloured sky made itself remarkable.

'That looks like a hail storm,' said Michael, uneasily. 'Indeed, Miss Nora, it would be better

if you moved on and tried to pass the waterfall before it comes to the worst. In a very short time we shall not be able to see a yard before us, and when you come to the narrow path, with a wall of rock on one side and a steep fall at the other—'

'I had forgotten that place,' said Torp, interrupting him, 'and wish for your sake, Miss Nixon, that we had taken our chance of starvation in the hut. Franz would have managed, I am sure, to get to us some way or other. Even now,' he added, stopping suddenly, 'even now we might turn back, and at least secure shelter from a storm that may cause you more discomfort than the wetting for which you are of course prepared.'

'Yes—go back—do,' chimed in Michael, eagerly; 'and early to-morrow morning, let the weather be what it may, I shall return here with provisions, and Franz and his father; and it will be odd if we can't find some way of bringing you home in safety.' He had unslung his green pouch while speaking, and held it towards Torp.

'No, no, no,' cried Nora, 'it is not to be

thought of: go on. I shall follow you as carefully as I can. If I fall you must help me up again, and for a shower bath of some hours' duration I am fully prepared.'

'On then,' said Torp, without the slightest attempt to urge an acceptance of his proposal.

And on Michael went, followed recklessly enough by Nora, who did not choose to be the cause of delay when every moment was of consequence. They had all ceased to look round them, or speak, and were just within sight of the wilderness of rocks around the fall, when a few gusts of wind put the clouds above and below them into commotion, and a few seconds afterwards an impenetrable mist enveloped them. The guide preceding them shouted, Torp answered, and Nora sprang on between them with a fearlessness that was very satisfactory to the latter.

'Keep to the left, Miss Nixon,' he said, as the first burst of the tempest swept past them, and the wind seizing her hat nearly tore it from her head.

'To the left—to the left,' he repeated, springing towards her; but the words were unintelli-



gible, and at all events Nora was too much occupied with efforts to retain a covering for her head in such inclement weather to pay much attention to anything else. In vain, however, she raised both hands, and struggled with the wind; the straw yielded in all directions, and even while Torp was speaking, the hat was borne aloft, and she had made an equally fruitless and imprudent attempt to snatch at it.

Another blast of the storm whirled her round until she became perfectly giddy; but she was not immediately aware that, when raised from the ground, the path was no longer beneath her feet, and that she was on her way down the mountain precisely at the spot chosen by the wildscheutz for his desperate slide. The first horrible consciousness of her danger flashed across her mind on finding herself flung on a heap of sand and gravel, that, without affording her a moment's support, began to glide downwards, carrying her, amidst a cloud of dust and sand, clumps of loose earth and a shower of gravel, towards the river that she had in the morning seen dashing in cascades among the rocks at the foot of the mountain.

Down, down, down she was carried with a rapidity that increased every moment. Being unhurt, she long retained both consciousness and presence of mind; made no resistance where the fall was hopelessly steep; and endeavoured to grasp whatever seemed likely to arrest her progress, when the decreasing velocity enabled her sufficiently to distinguish surrounding objects. She did not despair even when a deafening hurricane swept through the ravine, carrying with it large branches of trees, and raising the sand about her in palpable masses; but when the forked lightning dazzled, and the instantaneously following thunder pealed above her head—when she once more felt herself raised from the ground and borne along without the power of resistance, a feeling of utter helplessness took possession of her mind; she expected instantaneous death, or horrible mutilation; and, murmuring a prayer, had scarcely touched the trunk of a fallen tree before she became completely senseless.

How long she remained in this state she never could ascertain; her return to consciousness was, perhaps, accelerated by the furious raging of the

wind, and unceasing rolling of thunder, that was echoed a hundred-fold by the surrounding mountains. When she again opened her eyes, Torp was bending over, and watching her, with an expression of such intense anxiety, that a natural impulse made her sit upright and look round her.

‘Are you much hurt?’ he asked, gravely.

‘I—think—not,’ she answered, putting her hand to her head.

‘Thank God!’ he exclaimed, fervently; ‘for never in my life was I so horror-struck as on seeing you lying there, apparently dead.’

‘I have, indeed, had a most miraculous escape,’ said Nora, rising slowly, and supporting herself against the stem of a tree.

‘If you can walk, let us leave this place,’ cried Torp, quickly, as he heard the crashing of falling timber behind them, and observed some young fir-trees rolling past, that had evidently just been torn up by the roots. ‘We are in actual, immediate danger here, and ought to endeavour to cross the fall before the rain cuts off our retreat.’

He gave her her mountain-staff, which he

had found lying on the ground, seized her hand, and hurried from the unsafe shelter of the wood. But so violent was the tempest, that they had hardly staggered about a hundred yards towards the fall, when Nora was again thrown to the ground. The darkness of night seemed to overspread the sky; a few large, heavy drops of rain preceded a long, whistling gust of icy-cold wind, which was instantly followed by the most violent shower of hail that Nora and Torp had ever in their lives witnessed.

Let not the English reader suppose these hailstones were such as may be occasionally seen pattering against their plate-glass windows. They were compact masses of ice, like stones; and giving a blow that caused actual pain. Torp pulled off his shooting-jacket, and, throwing himself on the ground beside Nora, formed with it a partial shelter for her and himself—the more necessary as they were both without covering for their heads—and there they sat together, resigned and silent, during the hailstorm, and immediately succeeding torrents of rain, which poured like a bursting cloud upon and around them. Sheets of water seemed borne along by

the wind; and the noise caused by the rushing of the already-flooded river below, the still rolling thunder above, and the storm sweeping over the adjacent forests, at first prevented them from hearing the approach of the long-expected, and not a little dreaded woodfall, which they knew would cut off all communication with Almenau for many hours, and effectually prevent them from returning the way they had come.

When Torp started to his feet, the turbid torrent was thundering down the mountain-side, carrying stones, gravel, and sand, with blocks of wood, tossed wildly in all directions; and, while he and Nora were still retreating, the overflowing water spread to the sand on which they were toiling, ankle deep, half-blinded by rain, and blown about by the storm.

‘This is hard work, Miss Nixon,’ said Torp, from whose manner every trace of coldness and indifference had disappeared; ‘and I am afraid there is still harder in prospect, if you expect to have a roof over your head to-night.’

‘I suppose,’ said Nora, as they once more stood in the doubtful shelter afforded by the

trees, on the skirt of the wood, 'I suppose there is no use in trying to climb the mountain, and regain our path?'

'None whatever,' he answered; 'we cannot ascend on the sand that is now under water; still less here, where the trees grow on terraces, separated by walls of rock. One could not easily have found a more inauspicious place for an accident such as you have met with. Fortunately, I know the country about here pretty well, from having fished in the river below us: we must cross it; and once on the woodmen's path, on the other side, a couple of hours will bring us to a few peasants' houses, where we can get a vehicle of some kind or other to take us on to our village before midnight.'

'There is a bridge, I suppose—' began Nora.

'One of very primitive construction,' answered Torp. 'A couple of well-grown trees have been thrown across the stream, for the convenience of the foresters, but it will, I hope, save us from spending the night on the mountain.'

While he was speaking, Nora had been employed in pushing back her long braids of platted hair, now without a comb to keep them in order.

'I am afraid,' he added, on observing an expression of pain pass over her features, 'I am afraid you have not escaped as unscathed as you at first supposed.'

'Only a few bruises,' she answered, cheerfully; 'but we have no time to attend to such trifles now. The storm has abated; it is not to be expected that the rain will cease for some hours; so, if you will lead the way, you may depend on my making every effort to follow you.'

He turned at once into the wood, through which they had to toil for some time, over rocks, protruding roots of trees, and an occasional morass of black, slippery earth. Torp at first frequently offered assistance; but it was invariably refused, with a decision that not only effectually silenced him, but, in the end, induced him to walk on, and only show his consciousness of Nora's presence by stopping at intervals to ascertain that she was keeping up with him.

On reaching a tolerably extensive clearing, Nora perceived that the ravine became narrower as they advanced, and that there was little more than space for the river between the mountains.

It was, however, but at intervals that she could see the foaming stream; for a succession of vapoury clouds rolled through the gorge, giving only occasional glimpses of the opposite mountain, and making it appear of fabulous height and grandeur. At times, she scarcely knew whether she were ascending or descending, so rocky and precipitous were the vast masses of mountain-wreck around her—so unceasing her efforts to pass over or among them, without receiving assistance from her companion.

At length they began a descent to the river; but were still about a hundred yards from it, when the forester's bridge came into view, greeted by Torp with an exclamation of pleasure—by Nora, with a start, and shudder of apprehension.

The trunks of two tall trees had been thrown across the water, where the stream was narrowed by the rocks; a succession of foaming cascades completely filling the upper part of the gorge, while in the lower the yellow flood spread itself out as far as the ground would permit, successfully undermining many a stately pine: some of these, already uprooted, were being borne off



triumphantly by the stream, their green boughs stretching upwards, and waving in the distance, as if in despair, while others seemed to struggle hard for the privilege of death on their native soil; and, with roots entwined in those of the trees around them, resisted the violence of the waves, and were not unfrequently flung by them above the level of the water, where, covered with sand, earth, and weeds, the rain poured in no longer refreshing torrents on their drooping branches.

‘Halloo!’ cried Torp, ‘the path is under water! What are we to do now?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know,’ answered Nora; ‘excepting there is some way of ascending the mountain on this side.’

‘Impossible, without climbing-irons,’ he said, looking upwards.

‘I have pointed nails in the soles of my boots,’ she observed, stretching out a foot so covered with mud that the material of the said boots might have formed a subject of speculation—‘regular hobnails, I assure you,’ she added, eagerly.

‘So I supposed,’ said Torp, quietly; ‘other-

wise you would not have been able to follow me as you have done this last hour. However, I am happy to say our situation is not so hopeless as you apprehend. I think—I hope—I can take you to the Kerbstein lake, on the frontier. In such weather as this, we shall require four—perhaps even five or six hours to get there; but the fisherman and his wife will give us shelter and dry clothes; and you will need both, I greatly fear, before we reach their house.'

'Must I cross that—bridge?' asked Nora.

'Yes,—but I think I had better first try if it is all safe. In these sort of places it sometimes happens that the trees become decayed, and only the foresters are aware of—'

'Oh, then,' cried Nora, interrupting him, 'pray don't ventue on it.'

But he was already in the middle of the bridge, and putting its stability to the proof, by stamping his feet, and kicking away the remnants of mouldering bark and accumulated withered leaves that were likely to make it more perilous than it was already.

'All right, Miss Nixon,' he said, returning to her: 'you had better follow me as closely as

you can, and hold my staff as a sort of rail; for these barkless old trees are confoundedly slippery, I can tell you.'

'I know it,' replied Nora; 'yet were they anywhere but over that foaming water, I could walk upon them without the assistance of either your staff or mine.'

'Of that,' said Torp, 'I have no doubt, after having seen you spring along the rocks on the shore of the lake to-day.'

'A fall into such shallow water would have been of little importance,' she answered; 'but here—' she stopped, embarrassed.

'You think one might easily find a pleasanter place for a plunge than this just now,' said Torp, smiling as he placed one of his feet on the bridge and held his staff towards her.

'Here it would be death,' said Nora, 'and a horrible death too; the very thought of it makes me giddy!' and she leaned over a rock and looked down into the river that immediately under the bridge flowed in an unbroken sweeping current.

'You must not look at the water if you are

subject to vertigo,' said Torp; 'but I can scarcely think you are, after having seen you walk so fearlessly on the brink of a precipice not two hours ago.'

'You forget,' answered Nora, 'that I had then a wall of rocks on one side to give me at least a feeling of security, while here—' she paused, and then asked abruptly, 'Is there no way of overcoming this sensation of giddiness? Surely when it is not caused by weakness or actual illness, a strong resolution must conquer it! I must not give way to such folly—go on, and I will follow you.'

'Take my staff to steady you,' said Torp, not quite liking the manner in which she changed colour, 'and don't look at the water.'

Nora took the staff, but before they had advanced half-a-dozen steps on the bridge, Torp felt it tremble so violently that he stopped.

'Go on,' said Nora faintly.

'Rather let us go back while we can,' he rejoined, turning round and catching her arm.

Nora sprang from the bridge, covered her eyes with her hands, and exclaimed, in a tone of

the deepest chagrin, 'I cannot—cannot cross the river on those trees: they seemed to glide from beneath my feet, and the water to rise until I felt choking. Mr. Torp, you must go on to the lake without me, and send the fisherman and any peasants you can procure to take me out of this place.'

'I shall require at least four hours to reach the lake,' answered Torp; 'the fisherman and his son four more to return here; and in the meantime you propose to sit alone and wait for them in this deluge of rain?'

'I dare say it will clear up presently,' said Nora, looking round her rather disconsolately.

'It will not,' replied Torp. 'There is a fresh storm coming from the south-west, and even supposing you had a constitution to bear eight hours' exposure in such weather, without the necessary movement to save you from cold, it would be evening—night, in fact—before assistance could reach you. Few, excepting the foresters about here, could find their way to the lake after nightfall, and of what more use the fisherman and his son could be to you than I can, I am at a loss to discover.'

‘True, most true,’ said Nora, despondingly; ‘I only thought that with one at each side of me I should feel more secure perhaps—’

‘I doubt it,’ said Torp; ‘and as to our remaining here all night, or my leaving you in such a place, it is not to be thought of. The case is urgent, Miss Nixon, and something must be done. Give me your handkerchief,’ he added, after a pause, ‘I believe I must blindfold you.’

Nora drew her handkerchief from her pocket, and bound it herself over her eyes.

‘Are you quite sure that you cannot see?’ asked Torp.

‘Quite,’ she answered, holding out her hands towards him in a groping manner, evidently expecting to be led forward.

A moment afterwards she felt an arm thrown round her, and found herself raised from the ground before she had time to utter a single word of expostulation. In another moment she knew they were on the bridge, knew that her feet were suspended over the water she had so much dreaded; but so strong was the arm, so steady the stride of her bearer, that not a particle of fear mixed itself with, or ameliorated, the

acute sense of mortification she felt at having yielded to a weakness that had made such a step on his part a matter of necessity.

‘I beg your pardon, Miss Nixon,’ said Torp, as he deposited her safely on the opposite side of the river; ‘I shall never take such a liberty again without permission, but it could not be helped this time.’

‘I am sure,’ answered Nora, greatly disconcerted, and blushing deeply, ‘I am sure I ought to be very much obliged to you.’

‘But you are *not*,’ said Torp, smiling, for he had been perfectly aware of her previous unwillingness to be assisted by him, ‘and,’ he added good humouredly, ‘there is no reason why you should be. The rest of the way, Miss Nixon, though long, would be pleasant and interesting enough in fine weather for so good a walker as you are, but in storm and rain like this a march across the mountains to the lake will probably prove an excursion that neither you nor I shall forget for some time.’

Nora was already convinced of this as far as she was concerned, but she answered cheerfully that she was prepared for anything excepting

passing over rivers on forester's bridges ; and though the storm Torp had foreseen just then burst over their heads, she declined his proposal of seeking temporary shelter, and followed him up the steep rugged side of the mountain that rose abruptly before them. Not one word of complaint did she utter while scrambling through the pathless forest, heedless alike of the showers that the wind shook from the dripping trees upon her bare head and saturated clothes, or the slimy mud and treacherous moss that caused her to slide and slip, stumble and even fall repeatedly. They reached the ridge of the mountain ; but, unable to see more than a few yards before her, Nora could only follow her companion as he wound round or climbed over the rocks there, without having the slightest idea of the appearance of the country beyond or beneath the spot on which she stood. Their descent was rapid, and Torp showed considerable knowledge of human nature in general, and Nora's in particular, when a shallow turbulent stream was to be crossed, by splashing into it at once, and taking it as a matter of course that she could and would follow him though the water reached



to her knees, and was of a rather repelling dirt colour.

A succession of marshy meadows succeeded, where the ground seemed of sponge, scarcely offering resistance enough to the foot or staff to afford a resting-place for one moment, the water springing up on all sides and forming a little pool in each footstep. The ascent of a number of hills was a relief, and a narrow pass beyond them, with a stony path through it, made Nora hope they were approaching some dwelling, until Torp informed her it was the cattle road to an alp already deserted: they should reach it in about an hour, he said, but in case she did not wish to rest there, they could pass by without going to the huts. If not too much for her he should recommend going on, as the lake was on the other side of the mountain on which the alp was situated, and it would be evening before they could reach it, at all events.

Nora made no objection. Wet through as they were, an uninhabited alp hut offered no advantage, and as yet the weather showed not the least likelihood of clearing up. Thunderstorms and showers succeeded each other un-

ceasingly, the latter filling to overflowing the dried-up rivulets, and causing innumerable nameless waterfalls to foam down the mountain sides, or, blown into spray by the tempest, to mix once more with the rain from which they had derived their origin. The clouds hung so low on the mountains that Torp could with difficulty find the way. Once they were obliged to turn back, and on another occasion to wait until a storm had passed over in order to look for the alp and mountain that lay between them and the lake.

These delays, the various impediments to be overcome, and the labour of walking on wet and slippery ground, or over loose stones, caused the evening to be far advanced before Torp, pointing downwards through a forest of trees, informed Nora that the lake was below them, and a little more than half an hour would take them to its shore. Invigorated by the intelligence, she hurried on through the darkening wood, on a path that in some places resembled a quagmire, in others was composed of flights of uneven stone steps, among which small rills meandered busily, or fell in tiny cascades. She

no longer refused Torp's assistance when it was offered, and even during the last steep descent to the shore, placed her hand in his, or on his shoulder—precisely as he desired her.

At length they reached the lake, out of which the surrounding mountains rose abruptly on all sides but the one opposite to them. The full moon struggling hard with the lingering clouds of the last thunder-storm, and at times forcing a way through them, cast furtive floods of light on the water and the fisherman's lonely dwelling, which had been built on the only patch of pasture land in the neighbourhood. It resembled an alpine hut in its isolation and surrounding meadows, while the deep dark lake, and background of lofty mountains, gave a grandeur to its simplicity that rendered it picturesque in the extreme.

From the lower windows of the house bright gleams of red light were visible. Nora even thought she could distinguish the flickering flames on the kitchen hearth—but unfortunately the green fields, house, lights, and fires were on the opposite side of the lake, and Torp shouted long and loudly for a boat—in vain.

‘ They are at evening prayers, or at supper,’ suggested Nora.

‘ Very probably,’ he answered; ‘ but if they are all praying aloud together, as the peasants generally do, I have little chance of being heard. The wind, too, is unfavourable—blows right into my mouth! I wish I could manage to alarm the dogs!’ A succession of shrill whistles proving perfectly ineffectual, he added impatiently, ‘ This will never do—we cannot stand shivering here in our wet clothes all night—’

‘ Can we not go round by the shore?’ asked Nora.

‘ It is not possible,’ he replied: ‘ at one side of us the mountains descend into the water like well-built walls, on the other there is a river, now of course flooded, and—no bridge. Just walk up and down these few yards of level ground here, to keep yourself warm, Miss Nixon, while I make another effort to procure one of those scooped-out trunks of trees that the people about here call boats!’

‘ Nora did as he requested, and unconsciously prepared her ears for a shout that would waken the echos far and wide—instead of which she

heard a plunge into the lake, the splashing of water, and, on turning round, could but just distinguish Torp's head, as he swam out towards the middle of the lake.

He had thrown his shooting jacket and boots on the bank, and placed his purse and watch on a stone, and Nora, careless of his well-meant exhortation to keep herself warm by exercise, sat—no—she actually laid herself down on the wet grass beside them. She had not allowed Torp to perceive, but she now confessed to herself, that she was fatigued beyond measure; wayworn, weather-beaten, and exhausted, as she had never been before in her life.

The rain had ceased some time previously, and an occasional gleam of moonlight enabled her to follow the long furrow made in the water by the swimmer, so that she could judge pretty accurately of the time of his arrival at the boat-house. She once more heard him call the fisherman, but this time the response was quick and satisfactory, the door of the house opened, and men, women, children, and dogs rushed forth. A light glimmered in some one's hand, there was a confusion of voices, a barking of dogs,

and not long after the steady sound of oars dipping regularly in the water.

An unshapely boat neared the shore, and on hearing Torp's voice, Nora instantly started to her feet. He was rowing vigorously, and when she entered the boat, and prepared to take a place in the stern, he observed, 'If you know how to handle an oar, Miss Nixon, let me recommend you to take one now, and row across the lake, as the best preservative against cold.'

Nora stepped across the bench, and took the oar out of the hand of the fisherman, notwithstanding the most earnest expostulations on his part, Torp, the while, neither interfering nor looking round.

Who can describe the surprise and curiosity of the assembled family standing at the boat-house to receive them, when they landed on the other side of the lake? Who can enumerate the questions? The exclamations?

We decline the task, and leave all to the imagination of the reader.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A MODERN IDYL.

IT is to be hoped that Nora, and even Torp, have excited sufficient interest to make the reader unwilling to leave them at the door of the fisherman's house in the state described by Job as 'Wet with the showers of the mountains.' Nora's clothes were not only saturated with rain, but torn and soiled in a manner difficult to describe, and Torp had so recently emerged from the lake, that the water still trickled unceasingly from both his garments and hair.

The old fisherman, whose own curiosity had been in a great measure satisfied during his row across the lake, put an end to his wife's and daughter's questions and exclamations, by pushing them towards the staircase, and telling them to get dry clothes for the young lady—to give her the best they had, and the choice of their

Sunday suits. He made the same offer on the part of his son to Torp, and the whole party began to mount the narrow steep stairs together.

While the fisherman's wife unlocked the door of her state room, Nora turned to Torp, and, with unusual warmth of manner, thanked him for having saved her from the calamity, if not peril, of passing the night without shelter on the mountains. 'I am aware,' she added, 'that you put yourself into danger by coming to my rescue.'

'Not so much as you suppose, Miss Nixon,' said Torp, interrupting her; 'my fishing and hunting expeditions have made me tolerably well acquainted with the country hereabouts. For you there was undoubtedly danger had you remained alone, but, being together, there was none, excepting, perhaps, that of your not having strength to reach this place for the night.'

Charmed at his so magnanimously making light of his services, and relieving her mind of a weight of care and annoyance thereby, Nora extended her hand with a smile, and said, 'I have incurred a debt of gratitude nevertheless,



which—' here she paused a moment, for Torp, who had taken her proffered hand, let it fall with a suddenness that surprised her, and he was already turning away, as she added, 'which I can never in any way repay.'

Though Torp's actions, and not his thoughts, have hitherto been chiefly deemed worthy of notice, the latter here deserve a place, to explain an ungraciousness so strongly in contrast to all he had said and done during the previous five or six hours. Alas for the vanity of human nature!—he had misunderstood the grateful glance of the dark eyes fixed on him so earnestly, and imagined nothing less than that he had found favour in them; and that, after the manner of sentimental young ladies, Nora might think it incumbent on her to bestow at least a portion of her heart on the man who had preserved her life! To put an end, therefore, to all such 'stuff and nonsense,' he scarcely looked at her while saying, 'Really, Miss Nixon, you attach too much importance to this little adventure; the small service rendered you this day, I should have considered it my duty, as a Christian and a man, to have offered to any one similarly situated.'

‘That ought not to lessen my sense of gratitude,’ rejoined Nora, in happy unconsciousness of the current of his thoughts; ‘and you must therefore allow me once more to thank you for having fulfilled the “duties of a Christian and a man,” in a way so essentially serviceable to me.’

‘Pray say no more about it,’ cried Torp, with an impatient gesture. ‘You seem to have forgotten that you released me from a very unpleasant imprisonment this morning. If I have saved you from spending the night on the mountains, it is but a return for a benefit received, and there is no occasion for gratitude or thanks on either side.’

Struck even more by the incivility of his manner than his words, Nora turned abruptly to the attendant peasants, who, with wondering eyes and half-open mouths, had been bewildered listeners of this dialogue, in a, to them, unknown tongue, and saying she should be much obliged for any clothes they would lend her, entered the low wooden-walled room with the fisherman’s two daughters, leaving Torp to make similar arrangements with their brother.

Any one less acquainted with the Bavarian

highlands than Nora, would have had little hope of finding garments fit for her use in the humble abode of an evidently very poor fisherman. She had observed that the house—low, and chiefly built of wood—was very old, and the interior stained to the darkest brown by age and smoke; that though the fisherman and his wife wore stockings, the others had only shoes, and three or four little children had capered about on the wet grass before the house perfectly barefooted. Yet not for one moment did she doubt that from the gaily-painted wardrobes in the best room all her wants could be supplied; and she smiled, and expressed the admiration expected, when the eldest girl, with innocent ostentation, opened wide the doors of the linen press so as to exhibit all its treasures, and then, by mistake as it were, pulled out drawers containing green felt hats with gold tassels, black boddices, and flaming coloured neck-kerchiefs! Nora's patience was however rewarded at last by a choice of coarse but white linen, blue and white stockings, and printed calico, and bright coloured stuff petticoats. From the elder girl she borrowed one of

the latter, as it suited her in length; from the younger, a slim maiden of thirteen, a black boddice and a scarlet and green kerchief; a pair of well-knit stockings took the form of her feet, but no shoes could be found in which she could walk, until, after having dried and freshly platted her hair, it occurred to the girls that 'brother Hansl's new Sunday boots would not be a bit too small for the young lady;' and the Sunday boots of strong leather, double soled, well garnished with nails, and made to lace in front with thongs, were forthwith produced. Fortunately they proved neither too long, nor very much too wide; and Nora, perfectly convinced of the impossibility of ever again being able to make use of her own, was but too glad to avoid the contingency of being boot or shoeless the next day when the time came for her return to Almenau.

The passage outside the room was very dark, and as one of the girls remained behind to put everything in order again, and close the wardrobes, unceremoniously retaining the light for that purpose, Nora laid her hand on the arm of the other, and so groped her way to the stair-

case. At the foot of it, a red-flamed guttering candle in his hand, stood the fisherman's son, and near him Torp, completely equipped as a peasant, and looking remarkably well in a dress peculiarly calculated to show to advantage his well-proportioned muscular figure. With his arms folded, and head thrown back, he leaned against the open door of the kitchen, and Nora asked herself, Was it possible that the calm, indolently lounging personage before her could be the man whose unremitting energy and athletic strength she had during the day, so much against her inclination, been forced to admire? Greatly she rejoiced that he had spurned her thanks, and reminded her so opportunely that she had released him from imprisonment. And it was true, quite true, that she had been brought into an unpleasant predicament, and some danger, by her effort to relieve him from a situation just as unpleasant, and nearly as perilous, as her own had been subsequently. In short, as he had himself observed, she had been useful to him, and he to her, and now they were mutually free from all obligation.

‘Anything you please,’ said Torp at that mo-

ment, as if in answer to some question on the part of the fisherman's wife; 'Give us anything you please, provided it be quickly. People who have not eaten for so many hours are not likely to be dainty, and a walk across the mountains from the Wild Alp in such weather would give any one an appetite.'

The woman laughed, threw fresh wood on the hearth to hurry the process of cooking, and as the flickering flame lighted up Torp's features, he bore so strong a resemblance to his mother, especially as Nora remembered her sitting by the fireplace at The Willows on the memorable last evening there, that all her bitter feelings towards his family, and personal dislike to himself, returned with double force, and she passed on in silence to the dwelling-room, thinking how much she could have enjoyed so pleasant a termination to her mountain adventure had any one but Torp been her companion.

The sitting-room at the fisherman's was like all such apartments in peasants' cottages; but the ceiling, composed of beams of wood darkened by age, was lower, and the windows smaller than in any room Nora had yet seen; and through the

latter the moonlight entered sparingly. As for convenience and warmth, the winter store of fuel-wood was piled against the walls of the house, merely leaving free the spaces occupied by the diminutive square window-frames. The fisherman and his younger children were seated on the wooden bench with which the sides of the great green tile stove were furnished. Above their heads, suspended on a rail, hung shirts both large and small, worsted stockings and leggings, airing in preparation for the pilgrimage to the distant church the ensuing morning.

The children moved near to their father when Nora entered, and whispered eagerly, 'She's got Ursi's best green gown and Lina's new black boddice; and oh, father! they've been and given her Hansl's spick and span new boots.'

The last words attracted the attention of a bare-legged boy who, sitting astride on the bench at the table, was watching intently the flame of the candle, evidently prepared with a pair of old rusty iron snuffers to swoop down on the wick whenever it had attained a length that would enable him to do so without incurring a reprimand from his father. He turned round, slid

nimbly from the bench, bent forward to ascertain the truth of what he had heard, and then, resting the forefinger of his left hand on his under teeth, sidled towards his father, all the while gazing at Nora from beneath his eyebrows, with a mixture of curiosity and dismay.

As she took the place he had vacated, and drew him towards her by his shirt-sleeve, for jacket he had none, Torp entered the room.

‘Hans,’ cried the fisherman, ‘take your finger out of your mouth, and tell the young lady she’s welcome to the loan of your boots.’

‘It will not be for long,’ said Nora, smiling, ‘and when I send them back to you, Hans, you will find something that you like packed up in the same paper with them. Can you guess what it will be?’

Hans eyed her keenly, placed his thumbs beneath the faded green braces of his tightly-fitting black leather shorts, yielded to the impulse given by her hand, and, on finding himself standing close beside her, asked shyly, ‘Is it a harmonica?’

‘I think it is,’ she answered, ‘but I don’t exactly know of what kind.’



‘You put it in your mouth and blow music,’ he rejoined, more confidently; ‘there were hundreds of them at the fair in Tyrol, but—they cost twelve kreutzers.’

‘Ah, exactly,’ said Nora; ‘and if there be anything else you would like, I can send it by the same opportunity.’

‘A great, great, big, long, smoked sausage,’ said the boy, to Nora’s infinite amusement, and evidently gaining courage as she nodded her head and told him to go on.

‘And a—bouquetel of real flowers’ (he meant a bouquet of artificial ones, but Nora understood him)—a bouquetal of real flowers for my holiday hat! and a—a fishing-line—and—and hooks,’ he continued, eagerly placing his hand on her arm to secure her attention; for just at that moment his mother entered the room, carrying in her hand a steaming iron pan, fresh from the kitchen fire, and containing a quantity of the chopped omelette called ‘schmarn.’ She deposited it on a tripod, placed on the table for the purpose, motioned to Torp to advance, gave him and Nora each a horn spoon and an enormous slice of very dark brown bread, and

then, placing her hands on her hips, uttered a sort of satisfied sigh, as she wished them a good appetite, and hoped they would not disdain what her poor house had to offer on so short a notice.

Nora not only reassured her, but flattered her vanity by immediately commencing to eat and praise with such thorough good will that the whole family began to gather round her, while Torp, silently helping himself to his share from the other side of the pan, glanced towards her occasionally with a sort of amazement that, unknown to himself, began to verge on admiration.

When the remains of their repast had been removed, and Nora turned from him to talk to the fisherman and his wife about their cattle and crops, and then to the latter of her homespun linen and the children's school attendance; to the fisherman's son of the forest clearings in the neighbourhood, and the occupation that the sledging of the wood and charcoal gave the peasants in winter, Torp placed both his elbows on the table and leaned forward, surprised alike at her knowledge of such matters and the fluent highland *patois* in which she discussed them.

He found himself wondering where she could have acquired both, when the fisherman drew him into the conversation by referring to his fishery, and describing his winter occupations. This subject interested Nora also, and she moved nearer to listen, taking up at the same time the ponderous half of a colossal blue stocking, and beginning to knit with a rapidity that only a German education could give.

For some reason which she would have found it difficult to explain, even to herself, Nora did not choose Torp to know how completely she was fatigued, so she forced herself to knit and listen until the effort became downright painful to her. The stocking seemed to widen immeasurably, and rise to her very eyes; the voices of the speakers sank into an indistinct murmur, like the hum of distant bees: one hand sought her forehead, to rub away the unwelcome drowsiness, but remained to support her drooping head; while the other, round which the blue thread was twisted in a manner incomprehensible to the uninitiated, at length fell powerless among the knitting-needles. A few faint struggles she made to raise her heavy eyelids, to look round

her, to move,—in vain ; overcome by weariness, she first slumbered lightly, then, slept profoundly.

The younger children had been taken off by their mother in succession ; the elder girls had followed, and might be heard at work in the adjacent kitchen ; the ticking of the clock in the wall became audible at intervals, for the fisherman alone continued to talk, Torp having ceased for some time to answer, even in monosyllables. He was, however, not sleeping, or even sleepy—on the contrary, very wide awake, though he no longer heard the voice of the speaker, or took cognizance of anything in the room, save the slumberer opposite him. Perhaps he had been attracted by the white hand and arm, that appeared so strikingly inappropriate to the short, coarse linen sleeve ; or the rounded figure, that gave so much grace to a rustic costume of most ordinary materials ; or the fair face, in perfect repose ; or the braids of shining black hair ; or the long eyelashes, or—or—all together, perhaps. Certain it is that he might have seen Nora in London at fifty balls, and as many *déjeûnés*, in the most splendid dresses that can be imagined ; or spent a fortnight under the

same roof, in the most distinguished and popular of country-houses, without her having had the power to interest and fascinate him as she had done that day, during the storm on the mountain, and in the dwelling-room of the fisherman's lonely cottage.

And there was no mother or chaperon to put him on his guard, by looks of ill-concealed exultation; no relations to point out personal and hint mental perfections—not even a friend to laugh at him! But, after all, what danger could there be for a fastidious man such as he, in the contemplation of a Miss Nora Nixon,—especially when she happened to be asleep? So Torp gazed on, in a pleasant, dreamy sort of way, until the fisherman rose to wind up the clock.

Nora opened her eyes, smiled drowsily, 'believed she was rather tired,' and left the room in search of a candle. A minute afterwards, he heard her speaking in the passage, and, on looking out through the half-open door, soon discovered that she was making earnest inquiries respecting the time that the cuirassier, Seppel, had been with the fisherman's family.

‘Not here until six o’clock in the morning? Did he come by the woodman’s path, that was under water to-day; or—or by the Wild Alp?’

‘By the Alp. He told us he had slept in the loft of one of the huts there for a couple of hours.’

‘But he may have left it very early,’ suggested Nora; ‘before daylight most probably, or even during the night—there was moonlight, you know.’

‘Oh, as to that, there’s not a bye-way on the mountains unknown to him; but I suppose he wanted to find us all up and together, to hear his good news, or else he would have been sure to come on without stopping. Moonlight is his delight, and,’ added the fisherman’s wife, with a knowing look, ‘Seppel has been often enough out in the mountains about here at night to find his way in the dark, if necessary.’

‘Was he alone?’ asked Nora, gravely.

‘Alone! of course he was. He came here to invite us to his betrothal.’

‘Are you quite sure,’ asked Nora, ‘that there were no “boys” from Tyrol, or—other people with him?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘And,’ continued Nora, hesitatingly, ‘he was not uneasy in his manner, or in a hurry to leave you?’

‘By no means. He was as merry as a grig, and took a swim in the lake, and sang all the Almenau *schnader-huepfeln*, and danced the *polky* as they do in Munich, and was as fresh, and fresher than ever I saw him in my life, and that’s saying something!’

‘Did he not say he had met people at the Alp?’ asked Nora, slowly, as if unwilling to disturb the pleasant impression made on her by the last speech; ‘some hunters, I mean, who were there last night?’

‘No,’ answered the woman, thoughtfully, and looking round to her son and elder daughters, as if for confirmation. ‘I don’t think he mentioned anything about them; but he said he had heard the report of a rifle when on his way here. Six years ago I should have had my suspicions, and asked him some questions; but now he has grown steady, and wouldn’t, on any account, anger his father-in-law that is to be. If you

think he was out with wildhunters, miss, you're mistaken. I can answer for him.'

'I hope you may be right,' said Nora, slowly mounting the staircase, at the top of which she turned round to say good night.

Torp, less fatigued, was soon after tempted to step out on the balcony, where he remained among the flower-pots and fishing-nets nearly two hours, in apparent admiration of the lake, mountains, and moon. Why he afterwards went to his room, muttering the words 'stuff and nonsense,' we have not time to take into consideration.

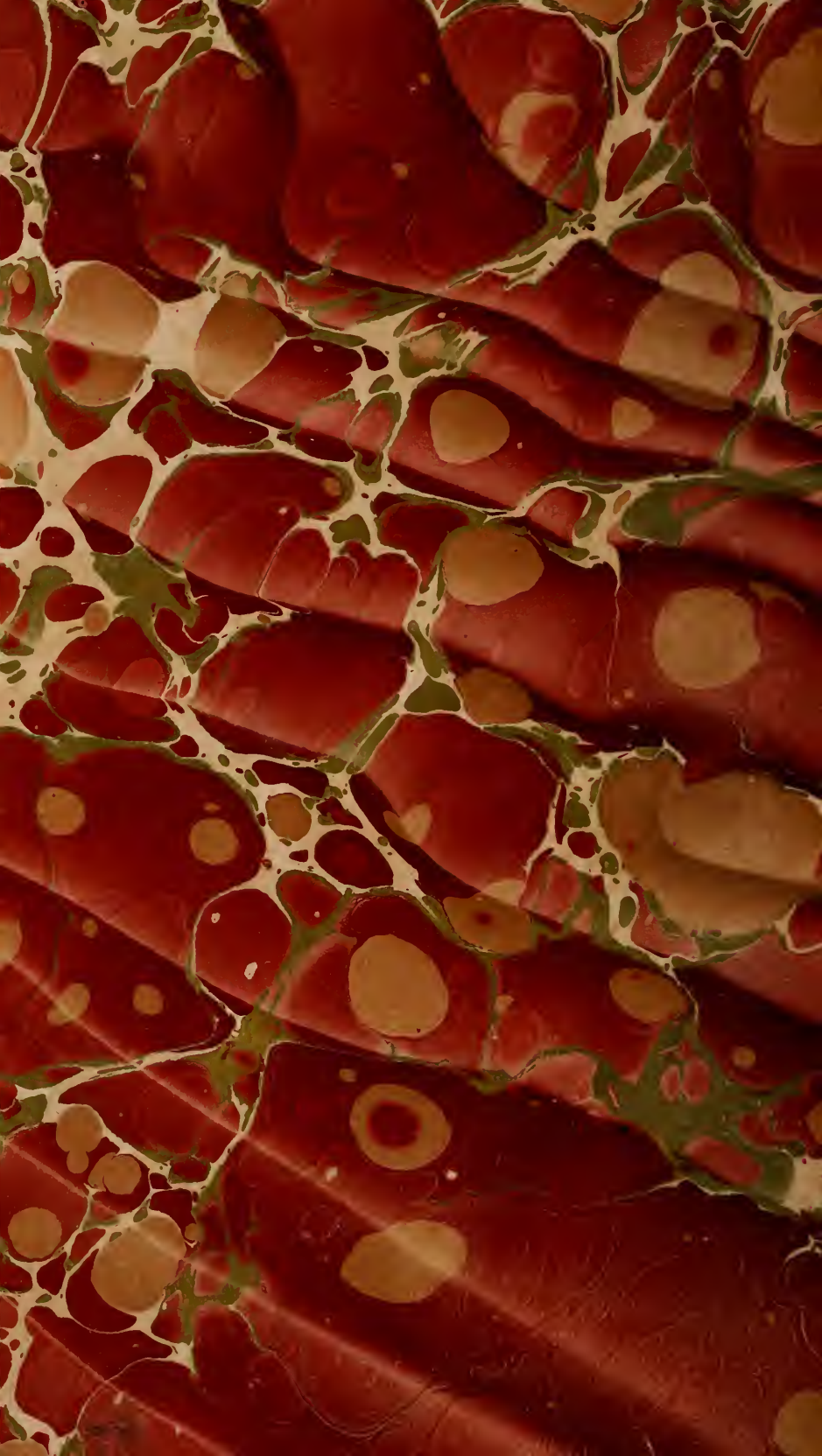
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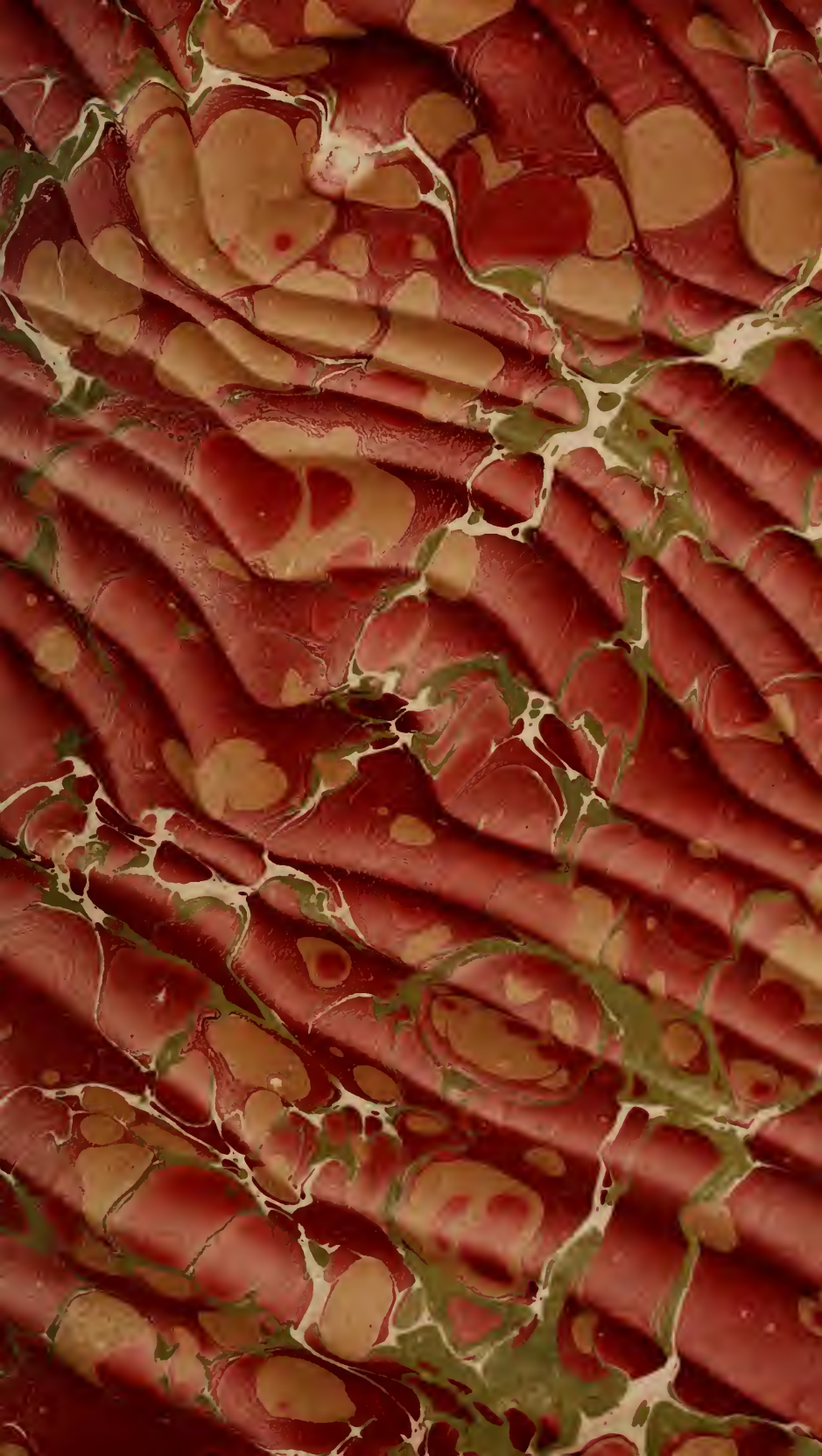












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